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THE NINE DAYS' WONDER.

A Novel.

1081

IN THREE VOLUMES.

BY

MRS. MEEKE,

AUTHOR OF

THE OLD WIFE AND YOUNG HUSBAND, AMUSEMENT, *&c. &c.*

You have worth
Richly enamell'd with modesty.

RANDOLPH.

. . . .

I see those who are lifted highest on
The hill of Honour, are nearest to the
Blasts of envious Fortune.

FORD.

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1081

THE TANJORE MAHARAJA SERFOGI'S SARASWATI MAHAL.

THE

NINE DAYS' WONDER.

CHAP. I.

"WHAT, in the name of wonder, is in the wind now?" exclaimed Mr. Milford, who had turned his head towards a window, near which he was sitting; "for something has blown that old gossip, Margaret Hesham, here!"

The party to whom this speech was addressed, followed the direction of his

eyes, laughing at a remark which the person whom it concerned, very justly deserved; as this Mrs. Margaret Hesham was a sort of walking gazette, or general collector of news in that neighbourhood.

" By her haste and unusual long strides," rejoined Mr. Wildham, " I guess her errand."

Before, however, we suffer her to divulge the important news she was coming to communicate, we think it necessary to introduce the party she was hastening to join, to our reader's notice.

Mr. Milford, the master of the house, was a merchant in the first line, at ——, a handsome Borough town on the eastern side of England, and was reported to be immensely rich; and not without foundation we are inclined to believe, since

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since he had, for many years, lived in the most sumptuous style, and had long prided himself upon his luxurious table, with which no inhabitant of —— had ever pretended to vie. He therefore seldom went from home, though he generally entertained some of his numerous friends every day; as he was very fond of company, particularly that of his superiors in rank, or of those very much beneath him in point of fortune; because the one set increased his consequence, and the other flattered his vanity. Indeed, having very few resources within himself, when not adding o his wealth in his counting-house, he quired the aid of society to enable him o bear the tedium of his evenings; there not being any taverns of sufficient note at ——, to induce such a man to kill time at any such places of resort.

For many years he had talked of retiring from business; but as it would have

 been

been a difficult matter to have got out of so large a concern, and he could not now with truth pride himself upon being the first man in ——, he was the more reconciled to his title of *merchant*, and to remaining among the friends of his childhood, who studied their own interest, when flattering his foibles.

His wife was generally distinguished by the appellation of the rich Madam Milford; and was, according to the general acceptation of the term, a very good sort of woman.

Their only son was the pride of both their hearts. From his childhood the had mutually agreed he should never enter the counting-house; and, as money generally smooths most difficulties, he was, at the period this history commences, a Colonel in the Guards: and it was too often repeated by his father, for it to be forgotten by his friends,

e allowed him a thousand pounds a quarter for his private expences, independent of his pay as an officer; and he was, at this time, upon the look-out for a suitable country seat for this idolized son. Hitherto none had been advertised for sale, or been proposed by his numerous acquaintance, of sufficient consequence to engage his attention; and as his son might reasonably expect to marry some lady, who would bring him such an appendage as her dowry, he rather talked than acted in this business.

The Colonel, who was at this time his father's guest, was in his five-and-twentieth year, and by no means a bad figure; but of what signification was that to a man, who was one day to have more than half a million at his command, and who was in consequence the *ton*, the rage, the magnet—in short, the *ne plus ultra* of perfection, at least in

the opinion of the inhabitants of
—Which place he always honoured with
a visit of a month or six weeks, once, and sometimes twice, during the twelvemonth; spending the rest of his time, either in London, or at one or other of the most fashionable water-drinking places.

But to give our readers a convincing proof of the adoration with which the merchant and his wife regarded this the heir to all their fortunes, and of the court which was paid them by the inhabitants of ——, we will relate a trifling incident, that occurred only a few days previous to the one on which our history commences.

The Colonel of course occupied the best apartment in his father's house; the windows of which opened, on one side, upon the extensive and well-laid-out garden (upon which the Merchant, who was dotingly fond of flowers, annually expended

pended, he said, seven or eight hundred guineas); and, on the other, into narrow street, which ran along one de of the princely mansion, where carriages now and then drove along; and, nfortunately, some carts or drays awoke he young officer, one morning, soon fter nine, and so completely disturbed is repose, that he was unable to resume his ap; which induced him to complain of intolerable a nuisance, in no very quiet terms, at breakfast.

The Merchant condoled with him very incerely, vowing he should never again e so deranged; giving immediate rders to have this unfrequented lane ttered with straw.

The neighbours, fearful that some of e family were ill, anxiously enquired hy the precaution had been taken, hich they thought highly commendble, when they learned the true state

of the case, and the then Mayor pr posed, for the still further accomm dation of the Colonel, having the stre in question unpaved! which was actual done the following day:—in such est mation were the Milfords held by the town's folks.

Little more remains to be said Colonel Milford, except that there wa at this time, a report of a treaty of ma riage being on foot between him and Miss Deloraine, the only daughter of Baronet of that name, one of the Mem bers for the Borough of ——, who was an heiress; and with whom he expecte to receive a very noble ancient seat, whic would qualify him for standing for th County, at the next general election.

There was also another report in ci culation, of his having, a short tin before, experienced a severe disap pointment

pointment of a matrimonial nature. But this was merely circulated in whispers, while the former was loudly proclaimed; the Colonel rather countenancing the surmise, though he frequently declared that "he was very un- decided respecting the business;" ra- giving people to understand, tha- overtures respecting this matc- from Sir Henry Deloraine, th- heiress's father.—How far -the truth, we shall, soone- be able to ascertain.

The next in the gro- assembled at tea at the Merch-, was a gentleman, much about -s own age, a near neighbour, and a timber-merchant by trade; and who was supposed to be, if not so rich as Mr. Milford, very much above the world. Unfortunately, he had no children to inherit what he was aware he must, sooner or later, leave behi-

behind him. He had therefore frequently repined at having no immediate heirs; till he had learned from report, what immense sums Colonel Milford was in the daily habit of squandering, when he was more inclined to [illegible]ice than to repine at his dissappoint- [illegible] as a spendthrift son would have [illegible]s heart.

[illegible] his court to this family, for the [illegible]pose of feasting at their expen[illegible] here were, in fact, few people h[illegible] more: and that sentiment soon [illegible]ates into dislike. Indeed, economi[illegible] both he and his wife had always b[illegible], it appeared singular that they had not accumulated even a larger fortune than the Milfords, who had always lived in the most expensive style; but the Merchant had ever been fair and honest in his dealings, contenting himself with the regular profits

profits attached to his various branches of trade; while the timber-merchant thought only of getting money by any means, which frequently induced him, for the sake of an exorbitant price, to give long credits; and the consequence was, that a statute of bankruptcy generally obliged him to content himself with a crown in the pound.

His wife was, if possible, more grasping and more avaricious than himself, and much fonder of news; therefore Mrs Margaret Hesham was one of her greatest friends: though to obtain her intelligence, generally proved a small tax upon her tea-chest. Still while she in reality gratified her inordinate curiosity, she classed her invitations to the old gossip as acts of charity; nor was the term absolutely misapplied, Mrs. Hesham no[t] abounding in the good things of th[is] world.

In addition to this respectable couple, were assembled the first physician in the place, and the Clergyman, both men of the greatest respectability; besides the Mr. Wildham, who had given the company to understand, that he was acquainted with the purport of Mrs. Hesham's visit.

This last gentleman had seen better days; and having borne his prosperity with meekness, he had preserved many friends in adversity. Mr. Milford in particular had taken him, as he styled it, under his protection, from the moment a continued series of misfortunes had rendered him a bankrupt; that is, he had procured him the post of first clerk in the Custom House: whereas, had he really been of a generous disposition, he would, by the loan of a few thousand pounds, have prevented him from being obliged to accept of such a place, to procure

procure him bread, as it was evider
Mr. Milford would have run little or n
risk, had he been inclined to satis
Wildham's creditors. Few people though
he had done any great things for th
worthy man; though he himself always
declared, it was more than he had an
right to expect. Besides, be it record
that, in addition to the two hundr
a-year annexed to his place, the Mercha
had given him a general invitation
breakfast, dine, drink tea, and sup
his house, whenever he had no o
engagements. In fact, Wildham w
most agreeable companion, told a g
story, and sung a better song; and a
was renowned for the excellence of
heart and temper, he was every wi
a most welcome guest. He had, howe
very politely declined the sort of gen
invitation the great man had given hi
but made no scruple of joining
various parties Mr. Milford contin

 enterta

tertained, when that gentleman ho-
ured him with a particular entreaty
that purpose.

Yet, notwithstanding these repeated
s of condescension of the Merchant's,
re were people who gave him no
dit for his politeness, as they were
eful enough to say, that even had
good man boarded with him, as he
hed, he would not have been a guinea
poorer at the end of the year; and
had he doubled his salary, it would
been doing no more than his duty,
he had stepped into the trade
ham had been obliged to decline,
which, undoubtedly, added as many
sands to his income. Be that as
ay, the worthy clerk was truly
ful for what he had done, as it enabled
to keep a very comfortable, though
nall habitation, and to maintain
idow and daughter of one of his
patron's

patron's Captains, who had gone to the bottom in the Bay of Biscay. His benevolence would therefore have put the great man to the blush, had he understood the real meaning of the word *charity*. But the unostentatious Wildham represented himself to be a great gainer, by affording the widow and daughter house-room; since the mother officiated as his housekeeper, and Catherine (the daughter) having been bred a mantua-maker, more than earned her board, according to his account.

The Merchant therefore saw nothing extraordinary in what he did, and thought his intention of laying by something to make the widow comfortable in her old age, no more than what he should have done in a similar situation; of course he found nothing to applaud in a line of conduct we must hope was recorded in Heaven's chancery.

Much to the good man's honour, Mrs. Ashby (the widow) was not the mother of Catherine; but the regard she bore her deceased husband, had made her resolve that his daughter, by a former wife, should share her fortune, be it what it might; and they had both struggled with the most abject poverty, before Wildham could induce the widow to lay herself under obligations, she well knew how to appreciate; as by her late husband, she had had a son, who was but three years' old, when his death deprived both her and his children of every means of support.

His vessel, of which he was in part owner, being uninsured, when he was so unfortunately lost, such a circumstance would, it might have been supposed, have raised a young and a very handsome widow many friends; but it was her misfortune to be a foreigner, Captain Ashby having married her while waiting for

for a freight in the harbour of Cadiz— at least such was the story he told; and soon after their return to England, Mrs. Ashby, who did not speak a word of English, was brought to bed of the son.

His father's untimely death appeared to have doomed her to come to the parish, as no one thought it incumbent upon them to assist a person born in Spain, who spoke broken English, and was moreover of so reserved a temper, that she had not made a single acquaintance since her residence at —— ; and all Ashby had ever told Mr. Milford respecting her, was, that she was the daughter of a clerk, in a Spanish merchant's counting-house, with whom he had a pretty fortune, of which he gave a convincing proof, by purchasing a share of the vessel he commanded. It therefore rather surprised the few, who

thought

thought at all about the unfortunate widow, that none of her Spanish friends sent her any relief after her husband's death, as her son had been christened Ferdinand, after some of them, they supposed.

For a time, however, she concealed her deep distress from every eye; and her son, in whom rested all her hopes, grew a fine sturdy fellow, and was fortunate enough to attract the notice of Mr. Milford, who, in a generous fit, placed him upon the foundation of the grammar-school established in the town of ——, which enabled his unfortunate mother to maintain herself and Catherine, without exposing her misery; and the moment Ferdinand was able to write, he daily earned a few pence in writing letters for the sailors' wives belonging to that port, whose husbands, for his father's sake, frequently rewarded his industrious endeavours by the gift of

a bottle

a bottle of spirits, or some other equally acceptable present; by which means he contributed, in no small degree, to the support of his mother and sister.

Wildham had long feared that Mrs. Ashby had preserved little or nothing out of the wreck of her husband's fortune; but the chilling reserve with which she met his kind advances, added to the embarrassment of his own affairs, rendered him for a time less observant of her distresses.

He became a bankrupt soon after Ferdinand, having entered his fourteenth year, had been, according to the established custom, dismissed the school, where he had certainly obtained all the knowledge its masters had to impart to their scholars. What now, therefore, was to become of the fine-formed, handsome boy?—Mr. Milford, who considered himself as master of his destiny, proposed binding him apprentice

to

to one of his Captains, or taking him into his yard as a runner; but, strange to report, the nearly-starving Mrs. Ashby was averse to both proposals; and having no friend to consult respecting her son, she, trusting to the known goodness of Wildham's heart, waited upon him, and in a long and private conference, made him acquainted with the various particulars, which so interested that good man in her behalf, that the next week she, Catherine, and Ferdinand became his inmates; and he informed Mr. Milford, "that, grateful as Mrs. Ashby must ever feel for his kind intentions towards her son, she thought it her duty to send him into Spain, before she suffered him to adopt any profession; as her relations might be inclined to take the task of providing for him upon themselves."

Mr.

Mr. Milford could not object to what appeared so reasonable; though we are sorry to say, he would never have exerted his interest in Ferdinand's favour, if he had not hoped to turn to his own advantage, those talents he was assured the lad possessed.

Now it so happened that neither Milford's nor his mother's plans met Ferdinand's approbation; as he was by no means inclined to become a dependant upon relations, who had certainly not acted a very friendly part towards his mother: nor was he less averse to a sailor's life; and to become a runner in the Merchant's yard, he was resolved should be his last expedient. Yet nothing was farther from his intentions than to remain a dependant upon Wildham's generosity; therefore, just before he entered his fifteenth year, he privately left ——, with a Captain in a marching regiment,

regiment, which had been some time quartered there, and who was going out private secretary to a Nobleman, who had very recently been appointed Ambassador to the Court of Madrid; and whose servant, being averse to quitting the kingdom, had given him warning a few days previous to his leaving ——. Ferdinand, having been early instructed in the Spanish language by his mother, had offered to supply his place, till he could be better provided; and managed matters so dexterously, that no one had a suspicion of his intentions, or could guess where he was gone; when his mother received a letter from him, dated Calais, in which he explained his reasons for having taken so strange a step; and, from that time to the present moment, though fourteen years had elapsed since his departure, he had never been either seen or heard of at ——.

These

These details may appear both tedious and unimportant to many readers—to whom we can only say that they are too materially connected with our story, to have been omitted with any degree of propriety; but as we appear to have totally lost sight of Mrs. Margaret Hesham, we will once more return to that respectable spinster, who had just entered her fifty-ninth year, was very tall, and remarkably hard-featured. Whether the latter circumstance was increased by the depredations of Time, or by the natural malignity of her disposition, we shall not take upon us to decide. There were people who attributed it, in a great measure, to her being still a spinster. She was, nevertheless, remarkable healthy, and would not have minded walking five miles before breakfast, provided she was certain to meet with a good one at the end of her journey, and at free cost; else the best meal

meal that could have been set before her, would have had very few attractions in her eyes: not that she was inclined to avarice, but she had the best of all possible reasons for being economical—namely, want of money. By way of a support during her pedestrian excursions, and she seldom took any other, she made use of a long taper crook-stick; and when she was in haste, as in the present instance, there were few of her own sex could keep pace with her: for as Mr. Burton, the timber-merchant, jocosely observed, she had a remarkably long stride.

"But," cries a critic, "how came a woman of this description to be upon a sufficiently familiar footing at the great Mr. Milford's (who, we ought to have observed, to his title of merchant, added that of banker), to enter his house uninvited, particularly when he was entertaining other friends?"

Why

Why then, good Sir, or Madam, you are to know that she was a native of ——, and had scarcely ever been more than ten miles from home; though her father was a Welchman, and a descendant in a direct line from Caractacus, if she might be credited. By profession he was a Clergyman, but had never rose above the humble rank of Curate, not from want of talents, or of a pedigree, his daughter would have added, but, as she expressed herself, from the shameful neglect of the Bench of Bishops. However, to do the worthy man justice, we must acknowledge that he had filled the before-mentioned humble station at —— for upwards of forty years, to the general satisfaction of his flock; and it was, in a great measure, owing to the veneration in which they held his memory, as he had been dead some years, that this, his only daughter, was admitted even among the first company; from whom she certainly met

with more indulgence than she really deserved.

The good old Curate had never been blind to her numerous failings, and had preached reformation to her for many years, to no purpose; he therefore frequently told Wildham, with whom he had been particularly intimate, that he believed there were foibles in Margaret's composition, which would attend her to her grave; as from a child she had been one of the most active propagators of news and scandal in ——. Still, during her father's lifetime, she was obliged to conceal, in some degree, this hateful propensity. But he was no sooner dead, than she gave full scope to her natural disposition, and had, in consequence, obtained the appellation of—*The walking Gazette.*

The scandalous chronicled country towns are generally provided with one

or

or more of these busybodies, as the less their extent, the more food they afford for scandal, the most trivial action of every individual being liable to the animadversions or misrepresentations of their neighbours; therefore, to those who would wish to live retired, we would recommend London, in preference to the most remote village, where every stranger becomes an object of general curiosity.

But we are again departing from this most renowned of all female gossips, Mrs. Hesham, who was sure to be infinitely better acquainted with all her neighbours' concerns, than they were themselves; and as she was blessed with a very good memory, she was continually recurring to past, or prognosticating future events; and as there never yet was a place where every inhabitant agreed, by entering into the prejudices of all those she thought it her interest to render her

friends, she was generally much better treated and received than she deserved to be. We must allow that she was by no means deficient in point of understanding, and even possessed a vein of satirical wit, which enabled her, whenever she chose, to discompose even the gravity of Dr. Summers, the Rector. She was consequently far from an unentertaining companion; and for the sake of the amusement her stories and conjectures were sure to occasion, she was allowed to go and come whenever she chose, even at the great Mr. Milford's, who, in common with the rest of her father's friends, tolerated her excessive freedom of speech; her sarcasms never being levied at those from whom she hoped to obtain any favour. It was therefore her sole occupation to proceed from house to house, repeating in the second, under the strictest injunctions of secrecy, what she had learned in the first, and so forward;

ward; seldom or ever, by this means, either breakfasting, dining, or supping at home. She resided, to his infinite chagrin, directly opposite Mr. Wildham's; as not a soul—nay, not even his tabby cat could go out or in without being exposed to her animadversions; and Mrs Ashby and her daughter had been, time immemorial, her aversion: the former, because she was a foreigner, and of a disposition diametrically opposite to her own, being to the full as reserved as Mrs. Hesham was communicative; and Catherine Ashby, having a sort of inherent dislike to the old spinster, seldom paid her that respect she considered so much her due, from a person so much her inferior.

Having thus given our readers a slight sketch of the characters of the persons who were assembled (it being a delightful evening in June), in a most elegant

summer-house, at the extremity of Mr. Milford's garden, from whence they had a very fine view of the harbour, shipping, &c. we shall suffer Mrs. Hesham to relate the news she was, if possible, more anxious to impart, than they were to learn.

CHAP.

CHAP. II.

OWING to the length of the gravel walk between the house and this pavilion, as the Colonel termed the summer-house, the party had the good lady in view for some seconds before she joined them; when every line of her furrowed countenance announced her to be the bearer of some very extraordinary intelligence. The greatest exertions seldom deprived her of her breath; she therefore instantly exclaimed—

"Mrs. Milford, how are you?—Colonel, the air of —— seems to agree with you.—Mr. Burton, your most obedient. I dined where I heard that you pay more duty to the King, than any other timber-merchant in his Majesty's dominions; and I promised the lady, Mrs. Burton, to procure her your excellent receipt for pickling oysters.—Doctor, your most obedient.—Your's, Sir," to the physician. "But have you heard the news, Mrs. Milford? I suppose my neighbour, Wildham, has been beforehand with me this time—so pray how is it, my old friend? for if any body knows the rights of it, you do."

Mr. Wildham having told the company, it may be recollected, that he guessed her errand, they all looked at him for an explanation of her speech, while he declared he did not know to what she alluded.

"Then

" Then pray come to the point at once, Mrs. Hesham," said the master of the house.

" Who was that gentleman that paid you a visit late last night, Wildham; and who has been in and out twenty times, if not more, to-day? Answer me that," cried the spinster.

" It was a person from London, upon business to Mrs. Ashby. Are you satisfied?"

" No," she retorted. " What, has not he mentioned the circumstance?" looking round her.

" No—positively no," rejoined Mrs. Milford, who was rendered unusally curious by the appearance of mystery.

" Oh, out upon all such sly doings! —Upon business to Mrs. Ashby!—Of what nature, pray?"

As the company were accustomed to hear her address those she deemed her inferiors (and among this number was Wildham)

Wildham) in this strain, they were more amused than surprised by these interrogatories.

"I have long thought that you were much better acquainted with what is going forward in my house, than I am myself, Mrs. Hesham," replied Wildham. "I should therefore feel myself very much indebted to you, if you would explain your meaning."

"Why, then, has not your friend, housekeeper, or whatever you please to call her, heard from her son?"

"I believe she has heard of him; but certainly not directly from him."

"No matter; I guessed she had, by the increasing impudence of Madam Kate; but if that insolent jade ever treats me again as she did just now, why mark my words—this," flourishing her crook, "shall fall pretty heavy upon her shoulders!"

"Well,

"Well, I must say, I always thought Kitty Ashby a modest, decent, civil young woman," said the Clergyman.

"Then I never found her so, Doctor; but she had better shew me no more of her airs, even if she has heard from her beggarly brother."

"You seem in a passion, Mrs. Hesham," remarked Mr. Milford. "But what is all this about young Ashby?"

"Why, like many more things, my good Sir, I suppose it will prove *a nine days' wonder*, if all I have been able to pick up, is true; but I find my neighbour can keep his good woman's secrets.—What, I suppose, we were all to be taken by surprise; however, for once, I have defeated your scheme. But pray, why did not the fellow come home at once?"

"You shall make him tell you when you see him, Mrs. Hesham," was the answer.

The company, however, finding there was some truth in the old gossip's report, asked Wildham whether Mrs. Ashby had really heard from her long-absent son? He acknowledged she had, adding that he intended to have mentioned the circumstance before they separated; but Mrs. Hesham, with her usual diligence, had spared him the trouble.

"Then pray congratulate the poor woman in my name," said the condescending Milford.

"And in mine," re-echoed his wife.

The Clergyman spoke to the same effect; when, anxious to amuse his son, Milford again enquired what had occurred to provoke Mrs. Hesham to threaten Catherine Ashby with an assault?

"Why

"Why, having seen a fellow in black, jigging in and out of Wildham's house, like a dog in a fair, it was but natural I should wish to know who he was. People that have been in trouble, may be so again; therefore I was anxious upon my neighbour's account:—but not being very partial to his Spanish madam and her mantua-maker daughter, why I stepped into Betty Thompson's, the clear-starcher's, my next door neighbour, and had hardly got within her half-hatch, when who should bolt past me, but Kate Ashby, with a bundle of her own and her mother's rags, for Betty to get up; so I just asked her a civil question or two, which the dirty drab, forsooth, refused to answer. However, she was no sooner gone, than I made Betty carry some of the trumpery back again for further directions, that she might endeavour to find out who the black fellow wanted; and as she is a great favourite of the

the silly body of a mother, why she wheedled the whole out of her."

"The whole of what?" cried the diverted Milford; "for it appears to me that Wildham has told us in three words, what seems to have cost you so much trouble and anxiety to fathom—namely, that Mrs. Ashby has heard of her son."

"Well, and is not that sufficiently wonderful, my good Sir? Who would ever have thought of the scapegrace coming to light again, after such an absence! But there is more at the bottom of this strange affair, than I have yet been able to learn; for Betty Thompson is a poor weak body like the mother, and was too glad to hear the *poor dear soul* had hopes of again seeing the young varlet, to ask her half the questions, I was anxious to have resolved; so pray, Wildham, tell us all how and about it."

"Come,

"Come, come, Mrs. Hesham, you are angry, and rather too hard upon my worthy friend," said Milford; "he may not think it proper to disclose Mrs. Ashby's secrets before so large a party."

"Grant me patience, Mr. Milford!—Secrets indeed!—A woman like that have secrets she wishes to keep from her best friends—and surely she ought to rank you among those! for did not you put her boy upon the foundation of the grammar-school?—and would not you have put him in a method to earn his own living?—aye; and to have maintained his mother, if he had not given you the slip, and left her to starve; or to live at the cost of those who could ill afford to support her in idleness. Nor do I think there was any great charity in so doing; however, that does not concern me—only her impudent daughter shan't shew her teeth at me again with impunity.—For you must know, seeing her go out a few minutes after I returned

returned from Betty Thompson's, I was tempted to follow her, and accost her a second time, purely to wish her joy of her good luck; for I understand the fellow sent them a supply of cash by the stranger: but Madam did not even deign to answer me, except by a broad grin. Indeed I suppose she expects that my neighbour Wildham, having supported her in her poverty, means to do so in her insolence.—Well, well, only let her keep out of the reach of my cane; that is the best advice I can give her."

Wildham only smiled at her threats, which were not less amusing to the rest of the company, who were, nevertheless, all more or less anxious to know a little more about young Ashby, whom they all remembered a fine, healthy boy, of very promising talents, and who had ever been ready to run ten miles barefoot to oblige his mother's friends. Mrs. Hesham, having never been of that number, was

was not among his favourites; he had therefore, like Catherine, been frequently deficient in point of respect towards her, and was, of course, included in the dislike she felt for his mother.

"But pray where has Ashby been all this time, Wildham?" asked the Colonel, who was roused from his usual proud taciturnity by this unexpected intelligence.

"Upon my word, I am not able to satify you, Colonel.—All I know respecting the matter is, that a gentleman in black, as Mrs. Hesham has informed you, came to my house late last night, and desired a private conference with me, which I readily acceded to; when I soon discovered that he came to make enquiries respecting Mrs. Ashby: I was therefore as communicative as he could wish; and he, in return, told me that he came from her long absent son, for whose

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whose return he requested I would, by degrees, prepare her; hinting that the young man had been very fortunate, and that he was come to England purposely to share the riches he had acquired, with his mother and the *unfortunate* Catherine—for such I term her, since she has so grievously offended Mrs. Hesham; and the sum he delivered into my hands, in charge for Mrs. Ashby, confirmed the truth of what he had advanced."

"And pray how much may the scapegrace have sent her?" asked the spinster.

"I did not inspect the bank-notes while they remained in my possession, my curious Madam; I must therefore refer you to Mrs. Ashby, who has, doubtless, ere this, calculated that she shall in future, be able to employ your emissary, Betty Thompson. I merely by degrees broke the pleasing tidings to her,

her, which the stranger fully confirmed during breakfast.—Whether he ran in and out of my house, as you represent, I can't take upon me to say; for I, as usual, spent the morning from home. I therefore only know that he set out upon his return to London in the coach, which leaves here at three o'clock."

"Then Ashby is now in town, I presume?" said Milford. "But surely this stranger did not take such a journey, merely to enquire after his mother and sister?"

"He did not say, Sir; and few people, you must know, are less inclined to ask questions than Mrs. Ashby. For my own part, I hardly thought myself entitled to take such a liberty with a person I had never seen before; I therefore only know that Mrs. Ashby and myself live in hopes of very soon embracing Ferdinand, who, I have frequently prognosticated, would make his way in the world."

"He

"He certainly was a lad of parts," rejoined Milford; "but he ought, if he had it in his power, to have done something for his mother before now."

Mrs. Hesham argued to the same effect.

The Colonel had no expectation of his ever returning to ——, for any length of time, if he really had made a fortune, though he might make his mother a trifling allowance; because every person in the town was too well acquainted with his former abject poverty, to pay him that respect such mushroom upstarts generally fancied their due.

"Spoke like an oracle, Colonel!" rejoined Mrs. Hesham. "I never heard of such low fellows having acquired a fortune by their good deeds:– however, lightly come, lightly go; and so ten to one it will fare with Ferdinand Ashby's riches."

Not

Not wishing to debate the point with her, Wildham was the first to take his leave; and after having again expressed their wonder, and exhausted their imaginations in conjectures respecting how the hero of our tale—namely, Ferdinand Ashby, had acquired this supposed fortune, (*honestly* they hoped, though the significant shakes of their heads were convincing proofs that they did not speak their real thoughts;) the party separated for the evening, trusting that, ere they met again, something further would have transpired respecting young Ashby.

CHAP.

CHAP. III.

THREE tedious days elapsed, which, to the indefatigable Mrs. Hesham, appeared as many ages, before she could obtain any fresh intelligence respecting young scapegrace; though whenever she was at home, she was constantly stationed at her window, to watch whoever went in or out of Wildham's. Nor was she without her subaltern spies, who were all called into action upon this occasion; some of whom were ordered to question the postman—others to watch the arrival of the London stages, and to bring her

her the earliest intelligence, should any one, resembling their idea of Ferdinand Ashby, arrive by any of them.

But on the fourth afternoon, just as she was preparing to sally forth, having given up all hopes of either seeing or hearing any thing of Ashby for that day, she caught a glimpse of the postman entering Wildham's house, with his packet of letters in his hand. As he was later than usual, she knew it would be of no use attempting to stop him when he came out, admitting, which she rather doubted, his having it in his power to give her any intelligence. She therefore hastened to Betty Thompson's, to whom she related what she had seen, desiring her to frame some excuse for paying Mrs. Ashby an immediate visit.

Betty had as strong a spice of curiosity in her disposition as the spinster, but possessed none of her effrontery; and had, besides,

besides, a real respect for Mrs. Ashby, and a great regard for Catherine, who never scrupled becoming her assistant when she was in an unusual hurry; but instantly catching up a cap, she said she would go and ask whether that was stiff enough before she ironed any more. Mrs. Hesham gave her credit for so bright a thought, promising to mind her house during her absence. She was not gone long, and the moment she returned, she declared that Mrs. Ashby had actually received a letter from her son, over which she was crying like a child.

Then I wish all may be well!" ejaculated the anxious spinster, ever eager to anticipate evil.—" What else did you learn?"

" Nothing; except that the young fellow is very well, and will be here soon, Catherine told me, who is ready to jump out of her skin for joy.—But there was another letter laying upon the table,

table, directed to Mr. Wildham. Who that came from, I can't say, and I could not very well ask."

"Your tongue is of but little use to you, it should seem.—But why did not you stop a little longer?"

"Because I knew you would be impatient; besides, it was just their dinner-time—the clock has struck three;—and I saw Mr. Wildham coming, which was the reason Mrs. Ashby did not ask me to sit down."

"And so you came away with half your errand!—I must therefore go there myself at last, though I have not set my foot within the door for years; but this will be a good opportunity, as I can say you told me Mrs. Ashby was in tears; and either congratulate or condole with her, as I find occasion. Wildham is at home, or I would not enter the house; but in his presence, the foreigner dares not be impudent."

So, without waiting for a reply, she stalked across the way, and, without further ceremony, to the great astonishment of its humble, but amiable inmates, entered Wildham's house, and proceeded into the parlour where the family was assembled. Her very unexpected appearance checked the tears Mrs. Ashby was still shedding over her son's letter. Wildham was reading his, but instantly laid it upon the table, and took off his spectacles, which he fancied must have deceived him, so little did he expect to have seen Mrs. Hesham in his house; who, affecting not to notice their visible surprise, asked them, in the most gentle accent, how they all did. But Mrs. Ashby's countenance unfortunately evinced such a degree of contempt for her kind advances, that she soon turned all the spinster's meekness into gall, who, in consequence, declared, she feared she had been entering the house of mourning, from Betty Thompson's

Thompson's account; she was rejoiced, therefore, to find herself mistaken.

"No doubt, Madam," replied Wildham; "though I think you succeed better in tragic than in comic narrative; however, for my own part, I was never in better spirits."

"Why, you certainly seem ready to strike up a hornpipe, neighbour."

"If you will condescend to become my partner, Madam, we will make it a jig."

"None of your jeers, Wildham, which appear to me very ill-timed, since Mrs. Ashby does not seem to participate in your satisfaction.—I suppose she has received some unpleasant intelligence respecting her hopeful son."

"And you kindly came over," retorted Wildham, "to insult her upon the strength of your own mistaken conjectures. Fortunately, she does not stand in

in need of your consolations, for, like myself, I believe, she was never in a happier frame of mind; as those tears which afford you so much satisfaction, are the effusions of joy instead of sorrow; and, from the same cause, I am, as you truly observed, ready to strike up a hornpipe; so go and trumpet forth that we have received some extraordinary good news.—Tell every one who will give you the hearing, that we have each of us received a letter from Mr. Ashby, who is very well, and means speedily to pay his compliments to all his old friends."

"I carry your insolent messages about!—A likely story, truly! I scorn to be your echo! Mr. Ashby, forsooth! I am ashamed of your ignorance, Wildham! By what other title could you have distinguished Mr. Milford?—But don't fancy I came over to pick a quarrel with any body!—Though I have not forgot Madam Kate's late impertinence, yet I defy my greatest enemy

to

to say I bear malice. I came to see you, Wildham; for I should not have paid *Mr. Ashby's* mother and sister such a compliment in your absence.—But Betty Thompson told me you had had news of the graceless varlet, whom I have still in my mind's eye; for I shall never forget his fastening a newsman's horn to my train. But the idea would never have entered the head of such a lad; of course I feel to whom I was indebted for that insult."

The bare recollection made Wildham laugh most immoderately; indeed it was with difficulty either Mrs. Ashby or Catherine kept their countenance; Ferdinand having certainly committed this daring solecism against politeness when he was about twelve years old; having first inscribed upon the horn—"This is to spare Mrs. Hesham's lungs."

 Well,

"Well, well, laugh on, Wildham; he may practise his jokes upon you next. However, I must say, I rejoiced when I heard he was alive, for the sake of those he ought long since to have taken off your hands. I suppose he is well, since you are in such ecstacies over his letters; and I own I should like to know how he excuses himself for his want of feeling towards his poor mother."

"That I can believe, because it would be gratifying your curiosity; though I can't think it at all concerns you. However it would not be doing Ferdinand justice (you find I no longer style him, Mr. Ashby) were we to keep the contents of his letters, either to me or his mother, a secret; as my excellent friend, thanks to this munificent son, will not be obliged to turn news-carrier or scandal-monger, by way of obtaining a livelihood in her old age. Besides, as I know our communications will not only procure you

an

an invitation to tea this, but many succeeding evenings, I think it would argue a great want of charity, were we to withhold them: therefore I am sure Mrs. Ashby will allow you to read the very affectionate letter she has just received, and I promise you shall have the inspection of mine."

"Aye, aye, let me see what young Hopeful has to say for himself; though it is a matter of astonishment even to myself, Wildham, how I put up with your repeated sneers. Indeed if I was not well aware that you are more often inclined to joke, than to speak your real sentiments, you would frequently seriously offend me:" putting out her hand for Mrs. Ashby's letter, which that amiable woman presented to her in silence, in consequence of what Mr. Wildham had said. Her inordinate curiosity, and the certainty she now entertained of being at the

 bottom

bottom of what she deemed a very mysterious affair, could alone have induced her to suppress the resentment she felt towards Wildham, for his late sarcastic retorts; but it not being to her interest to give way to the malignity of her disposition, at least till she had read these letters, she concealed her internal rage under a smiling countenance; and having unfortunately left her spectacles at home, she even condescended to request the loan of her neighbour's, which, though rather too old, she observed, made a very good shift.

Having adjusted them to her mind, she began to read aloud as follows, after remarking that the young fellow had not lost the fine hand he had been taught, *gratis*, before he took his French leave of all his benefactors.

"My

"MY DEAR MOTHER,

"After a silence of near fourteen years, which must, in your eyes, have appeared extremely criminal, your son once more addresses you; conscious that he shall be able to convince you, he has never been really wanting in filial duty towards that parent whom he has never ceased to revere, and to see whom, has alone brought him to England. Could you conceive how happy the return of my messenger made me, you would be better able to judge of my sincerity; and you would have seen me, instead of receiving this letter, if business of the utmost importance did not detain me in London, for some days longer: but I hope, ere the expiration of another week, I shall be able to claim your blessing in person, and to convince you that, during the tedious fourteen years which have elapsed since I left ——,

you have never been absent from my mind.

"'To express my gratitude towards your worthy and benevolent protector, Mr. Wildham, will be impossible; though I mean by this post to make a faint attempt to return him those thanks so much his due; and I sincerely rejoice in the hope that Fortune means to make me the humble instrument of rendering both his and your declining life as comfortable as affluence can make any of us sons and daughters of mortality.

"'To attempt to enter into any details in a letter, would be absurd, particularly as we shall meet so soon. Besides to make myself at all clear, would require more time than I can at present call my own."

As only the conclusion followed, Mrs. Hesham raised her eyes, and taking off her spectacles, exclaimed—

"'Mercy

"Mercy upon me! you might well cry for joy, good woman, over all these fine promises; for if he can but realize them, why I don't despair of seeing you ride in your coach-and-six: and I am sure that would afford the inhabitants of —— a *nine days' wonder*.—But what is this line at the bottom? A postscript, I suppose. They are fashionable, I have heard Colonel Milford say."

Again resuming her spectacles, and reading—

"Love to dearest Kate.——The enclosed is to pay the postage."

"I give him credit for his forethought, though I understand he sent you a supply by the stranger. But pray what may he have enclosed you now?—A ten pound note, I hope; then I shall say he has some spirit."

 As

As Mr. Wildham held the enclosure in his hand, he presented it to her, saying—

"I hope the sight of this will induce you to grant me permission to style my young friend, *Mr. Ashby.*"

Not having taken off her spectacles, without replying, she read—

"Mr. Robert Milford, three days after date, pay to Mrs. Seraphina Ashby, or order, the sum of one thousand pounds, &c. &c."

The above draft was signed by one of the partners in Messrs. ———'s Banking House, in London.

The

The sum appeared to have bereft Mrs. Hesham of the power of speech for a few seconds; while the happy mother, overjoyed Catherine, and delighted Wildham gloried in her visible surprise; and before she could articulate her astonishment, Wildham shewed her a similar order for five hundred pounds, which was payable to him.

"Do me the favour to examine that also, Mrs. Hesham, that you may be correct in your story. Here is the letter in which it came.—When you have read that, you will be as wise as we are:" and while the petrified meddling, old woman was scarcely knowing what she was about, examining and comparing the drafts, he added—

"That noble present is made me, Ma'am, in return for what has given you so much offence—namely, my having studied

studied my own interest and happiness, in endeavouring to render my house comfortable and agreeable to Mrs. Ashby and my good Catherine; and every line—nay, every word in that friendly letter, evinces the excellent heart of the writer. Yes, yes, truly did I prognosticate, when I foresaw Ferdinand Ashby would overcome every obstacle that appeared to impede his advancement."

"Why, you grow quite eloquent in his cause, Wildham," retorted his visitor; "however, you are certainly bribed to trumpet forth his praise. I only hope he has come honestly by the money he is so lavish of; though, were I in your place, I should chuse to be rather more satisfied upon that head, before I made any use of his profuse gifts. Great fortunes are not made rapidly—honestly I mean; and you know the old saying makes the receiver as bad as the thief. However, I dare say, you need not entertain any of those apprehensions, which I

must

must confess would torment me, were I in your place."

"God forgive you, Mrs. Hesham!" cried the agitated mother; "for I do not think such horrid suspicions would ever have entered the head of any other person."

"None of your impertinent remarks, I desire, Mrs. Ashby!—though you may fancy you are rising in the world; but I never valued any one for their money. —Give me birth and sterling merit, honour and honesty."

"You certainly stand greatly in need of the three last, Ma'am," replied Mrs. Ashby.

"Mercy upon me, woman! Why, this thousand pounds has set your tongue a-going at a strange rate; but I wonder why I lower myself by holding converse with you, since these are your thanks for my coming over purposely to congratulate you upon your good fortune;

but

but your ignorance induces you to misconstrue the meaning of my visit, and your obstinacy will, doubtless, induce you to reject my kind advice with scorn. I only wish that you may not have full time allowed you for repentance, should you slight my admonitions. The young fellow has got the full use of his pen; and I am sorry to say that th t is a talent which has brought many a man to the gallows; though God forbid I should say it will prove his fate."

The cruel surmise, improbable as she thought it, made Mrs. Ashby's tears flow afresh, while the angry Wildham exclaimed—

"Upon my soul, Mrs. Hesham, you would provoke a saint! So I must entreat you would, in future, neither trouble Mrs. Ashby nor myself either with your congratulations or your advice,

and

and that you would commence your rounds; for fear what you are so anxious to circulate, should get wind by some other means."

"That is as much as to say, get out of my house; therefore, you may depend upon it, I shall not be in a hurry to renew my visit: storming away as she concluded, rejoiced to think she had obtained a sight of the recently arrived letters, and still more pleased at having succeeded in alarming Mrs. Ashby. She had promised to return to Betty Thompson's; but it would have been shewing her rich friends an unpardonable slight she conceived, were she to tell her the news before she had communicated it to them. Away, therefore, she posted to Mr. Milford's, who had not left his counting-house, as he was become too fashionable a man to dine before five at any time; and when the Colonel was down, six was the

the appointed hour, as that gentleman could not have touched any thing solid sooner; nay, he seldom had much appetite before seven. To Mrs. Milford she was therefore obliged to open her budget, who was not a little surprised when she learned what Ashby had sent his mother and Wildham, observing he must have been very fortunate. Mrs. Hesham repeated her kind surmises, concluding by hoping for the best. Impatient as she was to be gone, for fear any body should get the start of her in divulging what she thought very wonderful intelligence, she chose to stop till the Banker made his appearance, to whom she related every thing she knew.

He was very glad to hear the lad had got so forward in the world, upon his mother's and Wildham's account, as what he had sent them, would render them very comfortable, admitting he had

it

it not in his power to do any thing more for them; and the best thing the old man could now do, would be to marry his housekeeper. Mrs. Hesham hoped he would not lower himself so much. They did very well as it was; and since they had made shift to live together so long, it would be hardly worth while to put themselves to any further expence.

Milford had merely mentioned their marrying, from a certainty that the old gossip would repeat it as a fact at the next house she visited, and that at the third, she would detail every arrangement respecting the wedding. Nor was he mistaken; for before the same hour next day, Mr. Wildham was congratulated by all who knew him, upon his approaching nuptials. The worthy old man only wished, he said, Mrs. Ashby would enable him to make Mrs. Hesham, for once in her life, a true prophet; as no one scrupled to give up the author of the report,

report, nor to repeat every thing she had said respecting young Ashby's return, and generosity towards him and his mother. Indeed the whole town were now more or less anxious to know from what source Ashby derived the possibility of making such presents.

Mr. Milford declared the drafts, when shewn to him, to be as good as his own notes, and offered to cash them immediately. Those to whom they belonged, preferred, however, leaving the money in his hands for the present: the former supply Mrs. Ashby had received from her son, not being expended. They, besides, rather wished to know how Ferdinand had made himself master of such a sum, before they appropriated any part of it to their own use.

CHAP. IV.

THOUGH it was really an object to Mrs. Hesham to take her meals abroad, which indeed was generally the case, she refused every invitation from the time she understood (which she learned from Betty Thompson) Mrs. Ashby was in daily, nay in hourly expectation of her son; having resolved, if possible, to be the first to circulate his arrival. She therefore never quitted her room-window, which commanded a perfect view of Wildham's habitation, for three successive afternoons, as she did not expect him

him before that time of day. Her mornings were therefore devoted, as usual, to visiting her subaltern spies, to hear if any thing worth her repeating had transpired, respecting the impatiently expected Ferdinand Ashby.

The postman had never called since the day on which he had dropped the two rich letters already mentioned; but Betty Thompson, aided by her suggestions, framed many excuses to go and come daily, but without reaping any information for her trouble, till the Wednesday, which happening to be market-day, Mrs. Hesham was sure they should know whether Scapegrace was expected so soon as they reported, by the purchases Catherine made. Betty in consequence, provided with a very plausible excuse, followed her into the house when she returned from market, and caught a glimpse of some sort of poultry

in

in her basket, which amounted to proof positive of his being speedily expected, in the clear-starcher's opinion.

Mrs. Hesham therefore immediately took her station at her post; but night came on without her having seen this provoking wretch, who she began to fear never intended to visit ——.

But on the following day (which she had assured Betty should be the last on which she would keep watch), while she was eating her morsel of bread and cheese at her window, which she would have termed her luncheon, though, in fact, it was her dinner, a well-dressed man, followed by a porter carrying a portmanteau and a dressing-box, entered Wildham's gate. Up she started, and, unfortunately, in her haste overset a small claw-table, upon which stood the loaf and cheese, and her best China mug, which had been her grandfather's, and she therefore prized it above all her worldly

worldly goods. The crash gave a momentary damp to her spirits; but since the loss was irreparable, and she thought her reputation concerned in giving all her friends the earliest intelligence of Ferdinand's arrival, she caught up her cloak, which she flung over her shoulders, and grasping her crook, determined to sally forth.

It was the time of day for the London stages to have arrived, by one of which he had doubtless come; nay, she knew the porter belonged to the first inn in the place, and at which one of the coaches put up. But then again there was a possibility she might be mistaken, and that this stranger might not at last be young Ashby; in which case she should only render herself ridiculous, were she to propagate false intelligence: not that it would have been the first time by many that such a misfortune had attended her well-meant zeal. But this was

was a matter of serious importance; she therefore resolved to be at a certainty at once: so, regardless of the treatment she had so lately experienced from Wildham, and setting etiquette, form, and ceremony at defiance, she crossed the street, stalked into her neighbour's house, and crossing the little hall, entered the parlour, without even previously knocking at the door. There, seated in a large arm chair, she perceived Mrs. Ashby; and the young man, who had occasioned her untimely intrusion, was leaning over her, supporting her head with his left arm, while his right hand was employed in holding some salts to her nose. She was just recovering from a fainting fit; and as Mrs. Hesham entered, she heard him say—" How are you now, my dear mother?"

This question solved all her doubts; but she could not very well retreat so abruptly

as she had entered; though hitherto no one but Mrs. Ashby had seen her, and that lady was as yet unable to speak. But while she was undecided whether to retreat or advance, the unceremonious Catherine ran in with a glass of water, which she had been to fetch for her mother (as she always by her desire styled Mrs. Ashby); and Mrs. Hesham, having taken her stand in the door-way, she pushed past her, crying—"Take care, Mrs. Hesham!"

The name, notwithstanding his long absence, was familiar to our hero's ears, and made him instantly turn his head; and, but for the few words she had so recently heard him address to his mother, the curious interloper could never have supposed that she was meeting the regard of the young *Scapegrace* she had known at fourteen, who was now a tall, stout, remarkably handsome man, in his nine-

and-

and-twentieth year. His complexion was very dark, which rather added to the expression of his undaunted countenance; while his black eyes awed even the impenetrable Mrs. Hesham into something like confusion. Indeed his lofty stature, and a certain air of grandeur, perhaps peculiar to himself, added to his muscular limbs, and almost more than human strength, had for some years rendered him the admiration of the fair sex, and the envy, nay sometimes the terror, of his own. He was handsomely, but very plainly dressed; and looked, as he felt, very much astonished at Mrs. Hesham's intrusion, who, soon recovering her wonted assurance, exclaimed, looking him full in the face—

"Why, can it be possible? Are you the impudent young rogue I knew fourteen years ago, by the name of Ferdinand Ashby?"

"The very same, Madam," was the reply, in a cool, haughty tone; "and I should have recollected you, even had our meeting taken place at the other extremity of the globe, and had our separation been of much longer duration."

"Perhaps so; I always gloried in being di tinguished.—But where, in the name of Fortune, have you been all this while? leaving your poor mother and your half-sister to be supported by a man, hardly able to maintain himself; and if you can afford to do great things for them now, 'tis a shame you did not do something sooner! I positively blush for you, as I have frequently done for them, for hanging themselves, like dead weights, upon poor Wildham. I should have scorned to have been maintained upon such terms!"

"I remember you were always renowned for your independent spirit, Madam," rejoined Ferdinand; "and you have

have my free permission to condemn my conduct as severely as you think proper; though I can't think my actions at all concern you: still I am very ready to acknowledge that appearances are against me. Yet if I am but able to excuse myself to the satisfaction of those most dear to me, and to him whom I must ever revere for his unexampled kindness towards them, I hope you will not withhold the olive branch."

"I extend the olive branch!—What is it to me what you have been doing, or where you have been? I only hope, for your own sake, you will be able to give a good account of yourself; though don't fancy that a few paltry thousands which you may have acquired (though Heaven knows how!) will place you upon a footing of equality with me, who am descended from the first families in all Wales. I can see, by your looks and manners, that you are very much inclined to presume upon the strength of

of your supposed fortune; but give me leave to tell you that I have not forgotten who you are, if your memory has failed you in that respect."

So many former absurdities of this old gossip's rushed into our hero's mind, that he was more inclined to laugh than to be offended at her malignity; therefore, with well-affected humility, he assured her that he was perfectly sensible of his own inferiority.

"I am only astonished," he proceeded, "that a lady of your family should ever condescend to enter this humble habitation; therefore my respect for you, which increases every moment, induces me to request you would suffer three such insignificant beings to be happy in their own way."

"That is as much as to say, get about your business."

"And

"And what else do you deserve?" exclaimed Wildham, who had entered while Ferdinand was speaking. "Are you not always shoving your nose, where your room would be preferred to your company?" rushing forward to welcome the stranger, which he did with tears of joy.

While they were exchanging their mutual congratulations, Mrs. Hesham lifted up her hands and eyes, exclaiming—

"Well, well; every one for themselves, and God for us all! 'Tis a good thing to have money in one's pocket. Had the fellow returned as poor as he set out, I believe you would have cried on the other side of your mouths; but pray squeeze out all your crocodile tears, for who knows but you may be paid for all this weeping and wailing; only remember what I said about a week ago, Wildham. I wish——"

"And so do I," interrupted the person she addressed, "that you would go about your business!"

This was spoke in a tone calculated to enforce obedience.

"You must know that at a time like this, your visit is doubly unwelcome. This gentleman and his mother have a great many things to say to each other, which they would rather employ the bellman than you to propagate."

"This gentleman, forsooth!" retorted his provoking guest; "may God keep me from such gentry!—Aye, do shove me out if you dare, Wildham! I will speak my mind—I do every day to your betters, and I am applauded for my sincerity; therefore, surely I may before this fellow, the son of a—— (but I won't dirty my mouth) for what I know to the contrary; for no one knows from whence

whence his mother came, nor where she was married; and you know I always said Ashby's untimely end was a judgment upon him. However, I don't wish to repeat old grievances; because, if it is as I suspect, the sin lies at her door, not at mine:—only don't provoke me, that is all."

The enraged Wildham flung open the door, while she added—

"I came over on purpose to welcome this young man, and to congratulate you all; however, since you deem my visit premature——"

"It is more than that, Madam," interrupted Wildham; "I deem it d——d impertinence; therefore once more I desire you would please to take yourself off, before I turn you out."

"Mighty well!" said she, with the greatest apparent indifference; though rejoiced to the soul to find she had

so thoroughly provoked him. "I shall take another opportunity to look in upon you, when all this snivelling is over; so for the present, good folks, adieu!"

"There never was such a d——d provoking, insolent old cat!" cried the angry Wildham, as she crossed his court, and before she was out of hearing, which only heightened her triumph; while Ferdinand, once more seizing his former friend's hand, said, in a gay tone—

"How can you, my dear Sir, be offended at any thing that old woman says?—who, I remember, was always reckoned a sort of privileged being. I have often thought of her, and have not unfrequently amused a whole company at her expence, on the other side of the Atlantic; and I must own I think she has improved during my absence."

"Indeed she has," replied Wildham; "though I certainly was to blame in suffering passion to get the better of me; but I do not think she ever provoked

voked me half so much, during the whole course of my life, as she has done within the last week; however, she is neither worth thinking nor talking about."

We shall now leave this happy party, to enter into various explanations, which we may at some future time detail to our readers, and follow the indefatigable gossip in her usual rounds.

She began with the Milfords, where, to her great joy, she was asked to dinner; in return for which favour, she recapitulated the preceding scene in such ludicrous terms, that she even excited the consequential Colonel's mirth, who enjoyed her having, as he supposed, humbled a man, whose prosperity he was very much inclined to envy, as he was fearful, he observed, it would render him assuming, and induce him to forget his origin, and former poverty.

"Then I will take care to refresh his memory pretty often," retorted Mrs. Hesham.

Milford smiled, and his wife asked if she should have known him again.

"Not I truly. Why, he would make two of the Colonel, and another dip would have made him a Mulatto!"

"Then, I suppose, he has spent some years in a warm climate," rejoined Milford. "He was always a stout well-built lad, and promised to be a very handsome man."

"And so he may now be deemed by some people," said the spinster. "He has a very daring look."

"Was he well dressed?" asked the Colonel.

"Very decently; rather modestly, than not."

"If he possesses any gratitude," said Milford, "he will pay me, who have certainly

certainly been the founder of his fortune, an early visit. I shall then be better able to judge how far he may be deserving of my future notice."

Mrs. Hesham agreed that his behaviour towards his generous benefactor would, in a great measure, decide that point; and the moment she left the eating-parlour, she hastened to announce our hero's return to all her other friends, to whom she exultingly repeated how much she had lowered his pride, and provoked the ire of Wildham. All, more or less, commended her for her spirit, as there was something very repugnant to the feelings of many, in the idea of Tom Ashby's son having become a great man; though we flatter ourselves that no one, Mrs. Hesham excepted, would have treated either him or his mother with equal indignity. But as it still remained

to

to be known how he bad thus risen in the world, they were all anxious to spirit up the old woman, to fathom what they all declared was to them a mystery.

CHAP. V.

THOUGH they would have been among the last to acknowledge it, perhaps no three people in the whole town were so anxious to see our hero as the Milfords; they were, therefore, very much gratified upon being informed the next morning, just as they were rising from breakfast,

fast, that Ferdinand Ashby requested leave to pay his respects to Mr. Mrs. and Colonel Milford.

"Shew him in," said the Merchant, who observed to his wife and son that the young man appeared, notwithstanding Mrs. Hesham's report, to have a very proper sense of his inferiority.

The entrance of Ferdinand prevented either from making any reply. No one rose to receive him, it may be presumed; though Milford thought the *Irish porter* Mrs. Hesham had described, a very fine fellow. His wife was angry at his superiority in point of figure over the Colonel; though, had she been asked which was the handsomest man of the two, she would, without hesitation, have decided in favour of her darling son, who was exceedingly mortified at perceiving this *charity boy* had both the manners and the appearance of a gentleman,

MAHARAJA SERFOGI'S SARASWATI

gentleman, and that his dress was by no means inferior to his own.

Ferdinand bowed gracefully and respectfully to his former benefactor; then paid the same compliments to Mrs. Milford and the Colonel; and, finally, enquired after their health in the politest terms.

"Set a chair for this young man," said the Merchant to his servant, who, in consequence of the polite appellation by which he had dignified Ferdinand, placed the chair at a very respectful distance from the family party.

Our hero took possession of it, without being desired to draw it nearer, while the proud Colonel haughtily exclaimed—

"I protest, Ferdinand, I should not have known you again; you are positively grown

grown gigantic.—If your strength does but answer to your bulk, Dame Fortune spoiled an excellent porter, when she afforded you the means to set up gentleman, which I presume, from your appearance, you have done."

"He is grown amazingly stout and tall since he ran away from us," said Milford, endeavouring to soften his son's rude remark.

"But don't you think his complexion much darker, my dear?" asked his wife.

"That is, I suppose, owing to his having resided in a warmer climate than England," rejoined the Colonel. "Am I right in my conjectures?" looking at the object of his late polite criticism.

"Perfectly so, Colonel," replied our hero, who had come prepared to enter into all those details they were so anxious to be made acquainted with; but the cool reception they gave him, and the impertinent

impertinent remarks the Colonel had made upon his personal appearance, induced him to alter his first intention; as we must acknowledge that Ferdinand, though he would not have thought himself authorized to display it even to a beggar, possessed perhaps more inherent pride than the consequential Milfords, who substituted overbearing arrogance to their inferiors, for that native dignity of manners which now distinguished the man they were so anxious to humble.

"And pray where have you been all this time, Ferdinand?" asked the Merchant, who thought himself at liberty to put whatever questions he wished to have solved, to the object of his former bounty. "I already know that you have been in luck's way, as the drafts you sent your mother and Wildham, were payable at my bank; and I commend you for your generosity towards the latter, who has wholly supported your mother and

and sister during your extraordinary absence."

"They were in high luck in meeting with a man of so romantic a turn of mind," remarked Mrs. Milford. "Wildham is a very worthy character, and has always been a great favourite of mine; indeed thanks are due to Mr. Milford, in the first instance, that he has been able to maintain Mrs. Ashby and her daughter."

"Mr. Wildham, Ma'am, is perfectly sensible of the favours Mr. Milford has conferred upon him; nor am I less grateful for those I and my family have received at his hands. The purport of my visit was indeed to return him thanks, for the obligations he has laid me under; for, whatever may be my present situation, I shall never forget that to you, Sir, I am indebted for that education, in default of which, I should probably, ere now, have increased the crowd of porters attendant in your yard: for

for I am certainly, as the Colonel observed, by no means deficient in muscular strength."

"True, true," rejoined the approving Merchant; "but, believe me, I never take any merit to myself for having had it in my power to serve a deserving object; indeed the reflection always affords me infinite satisfaction."

"No doubt it does, Sir," replied our hero; "and it is very fortunate when the will and the means to do good center in the same person."

Whether our hero's looks did not absolutely accord with his words, or whether the proud Colonel only fancied they bore an expression of irony, we cannot pretend to determine; but certain it is that that gentleman, feeling himself unusually ruffled, rose from his seat, crossed the room, took a full survey of Ferdinand, and then proudly exclaimed—

"Don't be insolent, fellow! I can translate looks better than my father!"

"Yet you appear to misconstrue mine, Colonel; at all events, they do not express my meaning, if they have given rise to your polite remark."

"Polite or not, Ferdinand Ashby, in my presence, you shall not insult my parents by your sarcastic glances."

"I repeat, Colonel, that nothing was farther from my intention, though, believe me, I am not at all intimidated by your implied menace. I respect your father, and came hither to express my gratitude towards him, neither meaning to insult, nor chusing to be insulted, because the expression of my countenance does not meet your approbation."

"You certainly forget who you are addressing, Ashby," interrupted the Merchant; "for though I acquit you of having had any intention to affront me, I shall not allow you to shew those

menacing

menacing airs to my son; therefore recollect who you are in future, if you have any wish that we should remain friends."

"You may depend upon my never obliging you to repeat your kind hint, Sir," was the reply, rising to make his parting bow.

"Why then I am satisfied; so resume your seat, and tell us where you have been all this time."

What answer Ferdinand would have made, or whether he would have sat down again, we cannot pretend to say, as at this very critical moment, a servant entered to announce the arrival of the Marquis of Stanmore and Sir Henry Deloraine.

"Shew them into the drawing-room," cried the great man; "and then desire Thomas to make this young man welcome in his apartment with such as the house affords."

The

The man hurried away to execute the first order, while the family left the breakfast-room by another door, communicating with the apartment into which they had ordered these great folks to be shewn; the Merchant, saying—

"Let us see you again soon, Ashby; for the present, make free with old Thomas, who is still our butler."

Our hero slightly bowed in return for this excess of condescension; and then, either from not finding himself inclined to lunch so early, or from some other motive, left the house, without renewing his acquaintance with the person deputed by its master to do the honours to him, resolving to take a stroll over his former haunts, before he went home, to relate to his mother the polite reception he had experienced from the Milford family; wishing to overcome a degree of resentment excited by the Colonel's behaviour, which

which would very probably have brought on high words between them, but for the arrival of the unexpected guests who had occasioned his abrupt dismission.

As he was descending the steps, the footman, who had received the Merchant's orders concerning him, hailed him in the familiar tone which the treatment he had experienced from his master, warranted; telling him that the butler was very anxious to see him.

"Then thank him, in my name," said Ashby, "and tell him I will take some other opportunity of convincing him I have not forgotten his former kindness towards me; at present I am rather in haste."

This certainly obliging message was repeated *verbatim* to Mr. Thomas, who, having imbibed a little too much of his master's consequence, felt himself very

much affronted with the young man, who he feared had grown proud as well as rich, swearing he would see him d——d before he would humour him so far as to call upon him at Wildham's, he staid there for seven years, since this was his gratitude to him, for having given him many a good meal, when he and his mother were starving; but she was as proud as Lucifer even while she was as poor as Job: so no wonder her son took after her.

Thus did the, in his opinion, slighted butler vent his spleen, while Mr. Milford was welcoming his noble guests, whom he had been rather in expectation of seeing, having learned that the Marquis was down at Stanmore Priory, his family seat, which was within a dozen miles of ——; and he seldom let a week elapse, after his arrival in the country, before he visited the ancient Borough Milford inhabited;

the Members for which generally gave the town's people, neighbouring Nobility, and gentry, a couple of balls during the summer, and as many public breakfasts; the Freeholders taking the same opportunity to engage the Players for a week or ten days, and to treat the great folks with as good an apology for a concert, as they could procure for their diversion.

During these periods, therefore, the town was very gay, and crowded with company; and as the country was upon the eve of a general election, the Members (one of whom, as we have already informed our readers, was Sir Henry Deloraine), were inclined to be unusually generous upon the approaching festival. Nor was the Marquis of Stanmore, though he was looked upon as the first man in the county, an unconcerned spectator upon these occasions, having hitherto

hitherto been always allowed to nominate one of the candidates to represent the respectable Freeholders of ——; and for the three last Parliaments, his choice had fallen upon his brother in-law, the Baronet in question, with whom he was now come to scatter a little money among the electors, as a sort of necessary preparation to secure their interest.

Milford, as being the first man in the place, of course received his share of the compliment; though the expectation it was known he entertained of bringing about a match between the Colonel and Miss Deloraine, was alone sufficient to secure his interest.

Of the Marquis of Stanmore we have little to say, except that he was a stanch supporter of Royalty, and, in every sense of the word, a well-meaning man, rather bigotted to his opinions—of course rather impatient when contradicted; yet polite

in his manners, and renowned for his affability towards his inferiors, therefore very much respected by all classes at ——.

Sir Henry was a true-born Briton, and entertained the electors so hospitably at Amesbury (the name of his seat), that they had never thought it necessary to enquire whether his talents entitled him to a seat in St. Stephen's Chapel. He had, however, hitherto preserved his independence; therefore was at all events deserving of their confidence.

He had only one daughter, to the possession of whom Colonel Milford aspired; indeed it was reported that, should this arrogant young man be disappointed in his expectations, he intended to oppose the Baronet at the ensuing election. Every body was consequently anxious to discover upon what terms Sir Henry was with the Milfords, before they promised

mised him their support; though they augured very favourably from this visit, and from the Colonel's having spent a few days at Amesbury the preceding week.

But Mrs. Hesham had, notwithstanding these promising appearances, whispered at Burton's that she knew Miss Deloraine did not like the Colonel; nor did she scruple to declare, though equally under the rose, that she did not blame the girl for looking higher; because, admitting the Milfords did roll in money, nobody knew who or what their great-grandfather was.

How far she was right in her conjectures, we shall leave to time to discover; contenting ourselves, for the present, with returning to Mr. Milford's, who received a very large order for wine from both his guests, accompanied by many judicious

 reflections

reflections upon his celebrity in that branch of his trade, known probity, &c. They then, having partook of the various refreshments, proposed looking in upon Mr. Burton, the then Mayor, to whom they had also various orders to give in his line.

As Mr. Milford never looked so great, in his own opinion, as when in company with titled men, he said he would do himself the honour to attend them to his old friend's, asking his son to be of the party, who, not having a more agreeable engagement upon his hands, condescended to oblige his father; though, very different from the Merchant, he had long thought himself entitled to the homage even of men of rank, except indeed they were his equals in point of fortune, and then his inherent arrogance induced him to shun their company.

As the Marquis of Stanmore's fortune was more

more than equal to his rank, and he had no children to induce him to live within bounds, he was more the object of the Colonel's envy than esteem. Still, as some part of his Lordship's immense fortune, it was supposed, would center in Miss Deloraine (though his only brother's daughter was heiress to his landed estates), it was necessary to treat him at least with apparent respect, since he rather wished to address him as uncle; but having been baffled in one attempt of that kind, he was resolved to play his cards with more caution in future.

Having rung the bell, the Merchant whispered the servant that attended, to tell young Ashby he should be glad to see him at his counting-house the next day, being to the full as curious as even the gossiping Mrs. Hesham, to know how he had come by the money which remained in his hands, subject to the demands of Wildham and Mrs. Ashby. The man

in the same voice briefly related how cavalierly Ferdinand had left the house. The banker was astonished, though he said it mattered not; when, had he told the truth, he would have expressed the fears he began to entertain of not being able to fathom what so greatly perplexed him, secretly blaming his son for his untimely display of his natural disposition, to which he attributed Ashby's hasty retreat.

CHAP.

CHAP. VI.

THE morning was delightfully fine, though rather sultry; they therefore proceeded very slowly. The Marquis had entered into conversation with the Colonel, and they were soon rather in advance, as the Merchant had a knack of every now and then stopping whoever he was walking with, and holding them by the button, while he endeavoured to convince them of the strength of his arguments.

Their road lay past Mr. Wildham's, and of course Mrs. Hesham's door. As she

was not unknown to him, the Marquis looked up at her window, this being a time when he was more than usually affable to all ranks. She was stationed there; having watched Ferdinand out, she was impatiently waiting his return. Her neck, however, had been upon the stretch from the moment she had caught sight of the Marquis and Colonel; she was therefore prepared to salute the Lord Lieutenant, which she did the moment he looked up: and, upon his Lordship's returning the compliment, she flung open her casement (for, mortifying to relate, her house was not sashed). They had not, however, exchanged more than three words, ere the Marquis caught sight of a gentleman, who was advancing towards them, and who, when near enough, he immediately recognised; abruptly leaving both the Colonel and Mrs. Hesham, he hastened to give him the meeting, extending his ungloved hand

to receive that of the stranger, whom he saluted with a degree of cordiality, that absolutely petrified the wondering Colonel, and which was nearly making the old gossip scream with surprise, when they discovered he was thus affable to that *scapegrace*, Ferdinand Ashby, who appeared as happy to see his Lordship, as the Peer evidently was to see him. Mr. Milford's astonishment, if possible, exceeded his son's; while, seizing the Member by the button, he exclaimed—

"Why surely my eyes deceive me! Do you know that fellow, Sir Henry?"

"No, Sir," and they walked on again; till they joined the transfixed Colonel, who remained immoveable where the Marquis had left him; when Mrs. Hesham, whose amazement at least equalled their's, called out—

"Heyday, good folks! Why, you seem to be all struck of heaps; and well you

you may; for, as I am alive, the Marquis of Stanmore is shaking hands with Nandy Ashby!—Has the fellow a vote for the Borough?—though if he has, I think his Lordship is greatly lowering himself."

So thought the Colonel, who would much sooner have expended any sum in bribery, than have shaken hands with a man, so every way, in his opinion, his inferior; yet how came the Marquis to be acquainted with this insolent fellow? for such he conceived him to be: and he had in consequence resolved not to give him the least encouragement.

Such were his reflections, when his father asked him what all this meant.

"You are as wise as myself, Sir."

"Well, but z——ds! the Marquis must have been led into an error," rejoined the Merchant. "Sir Henry Deloraine knows nothing about the fellow.

fellow. I must find out what all this means," advancing towards the two gentlemen, when he heard the Marquis say—

"Had I known your Excellency had been coming into this part of England, I should most certainly have requested you would have made the Priory your home as long as you could have made it convenient. I only hope that you will not forget you stand engaged to spend a week or a fortnight with me before you return to Madrid."

"You do me honour, Marquis. I came hither, and meant to have remained *incognito* during my stay, though a very sacred duty called me here; but I dare say you will be as much astonished when I inform you that my mother is the widow of one of Mr. Milford's Captains, as that gentleman and his son appear to be, at your having condescended to address me."

"I

"I was rather prepared by your uncle's letter, for what otherwise certainly would have appeared an enigma to me. He hinted to me that your mother had married rather beneath herself; but, as you observe, our unexpected meeting appears to have surprised my worthy host. — Sir Henry, you are unacquainted with this gentleman; therefore allow me to introduce you to the Marquis Almaviva, nephew to the Dukes de L'Infantado and of Medina Sidonia, and at this time Extraordinary Ambassador from the Court of Madrid to that of Great Britain. Marquis, permit me to introduce you to Sir Henry Deloraine, my brother-in-law: I fancy I need not extend my introduction of your Lordship to Mr. and Colonel Milford?"

"Mr. Milford has known me from an infant, Marquis," replied Ferdinand. "I was at his house when you arrived, whither I went to thank him for having placed me upon the foundation of the grammar-school in this town, for which

I shall

I shall ever consider myself greatly his debtor; but, unaccustomed of late to express myself in English, neither my words nor my looks met the approbation of Colonel Milford: I was therefore withheld from entering into any details respecting myself, lest I should unintentionally have given still farther offence."

That Ferdinand's countenance was now very expressive of irony, we must acknowledge, and also that the Marquis of Stanmore had some difficulty to suppress the strong inclination he felt to laugh in the Milfords' faces, while he said—

"A mere trifling misunderstanding I conceive, your Excellency, which I am convinced will be totally done away, now my worthy friend is acquainted with your rank; as you probably both thought the other deficient in respect, owing to his ignorance of what was your due."

"Why,

"Why, really, my Lord Marquis," said Milford, "I am still very much in the dark, and I cannot think you are so well acquainted with that young man as I am; to whom I certainly hinted that he took very great liberties with Colonel Milford."

"Oh, his Excellency's *incognito* perfectly accounts for your error, my dear Milford; besides, I can suppose that a sort of mystery has hitherto hung over his mother, which may have given rise to both impertinent and unpleasant conjectures. However, as I have very unintentionally discovered his Lordship's rank, you will not, in future, be at a loss how to treat him, even admitting that he still chuses to preserve his *incognito.*"

"That would now be impossible, Marquis," replied our hero, in a gay tone, looking up at Mrs. Hesham (who, at the risk of her neck, was half out of her window, devouring every word she heard); "nor

"nor did I mean to have made any secret of my present rank to my former benefactor, had the reception he gave me, been more congenial to my feelings."

"Well, I will not trespass any longer at present upon your Lordship's time; I only hope you are come to make some stay at ——."

"Ten days, or a fortnight, Marquis, if business does not sooner call me to London."

"I am happy to hear it, as I suppose I need not tell you that next week the Members give their annual gala to their constituents. I shall, in consequence, spend a few days here, when I hope to enjoy a little more of your company, as by that time I trust you will have prepared your mother to receive a visit from a very old friend of her family; and I shall then endeavour to prevail upon you both to return with me to the Priory, where I shall detain you prisoners till you are officially summoned to London."

Sir

Sir Henry Deloraine also said he should be very happy to see the Marquis Almaviva at Amesbury, where he would give him a family dinner, and a good bed, whenever he was not better engaged; adding—

"I am a widower, Marquis; therefore all ceremony is banished from my board: but I fancy a hearty welcome is a very good substitute for unmeaning compliments."

"It must, at all events, be much more flattering to your guests, Sir Henry," returned our hero, making his parting bow, and entering Wildham's court, to the infinite joy of the Merchant and his son, who were bursting as it were with envy and curiosity; when the Marquis of Stanmore, who felt rather piqued at their not having seized the opportunity he had purposely afforded them, to apologize to Ferdinand, exclaimed—

"Why,

"Why, how is all this, gentlemen?—While you were in ignorance of the Marquis Almaviva's rank, your conduct towards him was of little consequence; but I own your recent behaviour has rather surprised me."

"I must be better convinced of his being a Marquis, my Lord, before I shew him any respect," replied Milford. "Indeed I am certain that I shall be able to prove to your Lordship that you have been most egregiously imposed upon by him. His assurance astonishes me even more than your condescension; however, I am resolved I will not sleep till I am at the bottom of this iniquitous business;" beginning to relate every thing he knew respecting the object of his envy, and his mother; who he affirmed, had remained in a starving condition from the time Ashby had perished, till Wildham had offered her an asylum; expatiating very warmly upon his own generosity towards this would-be Marquis, and concluding by bitterly

bitterly inveighing against him, for having left his mother a dependant upon the bounty of a man, hardly able to support himself; though he had chosen to preface his visit by a present, which had passed through his hands, and which, had he been Wildham, he should have scorned to have accepted; acknowledging that he had paid him a visit about an hour before, and if airs were a proof of high birth, he had certainly established his claims to greatness.

The Marquis was, however, so minute in his enquiries respecting what passed, that he soon discovered which of the party had given themselves most airs. Without, however, making the remark, he said—

"I make no doubt of every thing you have advanced being absolute Gospel, Milford; still you have totally failed in convincing me that the Marquis Almaviva is an impostor, which appears to me

to have been your intention; but I think you will acknowledge that he may (notwithstanding he was born at ——, and that he has hitherto been supposed to be the son of Captain Ashby—nay, that he is, as he politely acknowledged, indebted to your benevolence for his first education), be a man of rank and fortune, when I assure you, upon my honour, that I saw him presented at St. James's, not a fortnight since, by the Spanish Minister resident in London, as Ambassador Extraordinary from his Court to our's. In addition to which circumstance, he has brought letters from his uncle, the Duke de L'Infantado, now Prime Minister to His Most Catholic Majesty, to several of our first Nobility, and also to me; therefore I can entertain no doubts respecting his right to the title by which he is distinguished."

"It certainly appears to be a very deep-laid plan," interrupted Milford.

"In

"In what respect, my good friend?—You are surely not so prejudiced, as to suppose that one of the first Monarchs in Europe, or his Prime Minister (who I believe I might, without being accused of exaggeration, term one of the first and richest subjects in the known world) would offer such an insult to our Monarch, as to send a man of low extraction, or doubtful origin, upon such an errand; for my own part, I only wish I was as sure of salvation, as I am certain that he is the person his uncle represents him to be—namely, his sister's son, and Marquis of Almaviva.

"You cannot have forgot that, in my younger days, I was for some years Ambassador at the Court of Madrid, where I became intimate with the late and present Duke de L'Infantado; and the daughter of the former, and sister to the latter, is the mother of Don Ferdinand de Guzman, Marquis of Almaviva. During

During my residence in Spain, she married the younger brother of a family equally noble, but who was, like herself, intended to be dedicated to the service of the Church:—that is, he was to increase the tribe of Priests—she, that of the holy sisterhood of Nuns.

"So many years have elapsed since the circumstance took place, that, but for the hints thrown out in my friend's letter, it would never have recurred to my memory; nor can I now recollect the particulars. Indeed the matter was very much hushed up; but in endeavouring to make their escape to England (if I remember right, and Mrs. Ashby's arrival here confirms the circumstance), they were pursued or discovered, I hardly know which; and, in attempting to defend his wife, the husband unfortunately received a death-wound, which, horrible as was the circumstance, enabled the miserable widow to make her escape unmolested;

molested; and, by way of keeping her retreat a secret from her family, who, thinking their honour was at stake, were implacable, I suppose she married Ashby, though, doubtless, not till after the birth of this son by her first husband: nor can I wonder at her having taken so strange a step, since, had she been discovered at the time, there is no knowing what she might have been doomed to undergo.

"Whether she ever addressed any individual in behalf of her son, or how he came to be acknowledged by both his paternal and maternal uncles, who consider him as their heir, I cannot inform you: I only know that the Duke of Medina Sidonia, the elder brother of the late unfortunate Marquis Almaviva, has been for some time Viceroy of Mexico, and that the present Marquis of that name, who has very large estates in that part of the New World (as the Spaniards term their possessions in South America), is

is very lately returned from thence; having been long before recognised and acknowledged by both his uncles, and his maternal one probably sent him over in his official capacity, to afford him an opportunity of seeing his mother;—therefore I give you my word that this young gentleman, whom you appear to hold in a degree of contempt (which, after what I have said, I think is rather a reflection upon your understanding), is already considered as one of the first men in Spain, and treated as such at our Court; for, independent of his vast expectations from his two uncles, I am assured that he is already what may be deemed too rich for an individual; therefore as a friend, Milford, I would advise you to shew him a little respect in future."

"Why, positively, my Lord, though all you say, may be very true, yet hang me if I do not think this Ambassador, as you are pleased to call him, will turn out to be a counterfeit at last; because,

if he had been the great man you make him out to be, why he would hardly have sneaked into this town in a stage-coach, and have taken up his abode at Wildham's, whose best bedchamber is a very poor make-shift: besides, if you had not blown him, he would not have let any of us have known how great he was become."

"That you were not acquainted with his rank, appears to have been your own fault, Milford. The Marquis acknowledged he visited you this morning, for the express purpose of making himself known to you; and you heard the reasons he gave for having altered his mind.—As he wished to travel *incognito*, he was perfectly right in making use of a stage-coach; and surely he paid Mr. Wildham a very high compliment, by becoming his inmate."

"Your Lordship seems resolved to find excuses for him," said the angry Milford; "but surely if he is so rich

and

and so powerful, he might have done something before now for his poor mother: though I can't make out how she came to be the wife of two men at the same time; and I remember your *great man* being born as well as if it was but yesterday; and, according to Tom Ashby's account, he had married the mother ten months before, at Cales; therefore somebody or other has been imposed upon—perhaps these Spanish Grandees; for Ferdinand was always a very clever boy, and there is no knowing what he may have made them believe."

"Is it possible, Milford, that you can be so absurdly prejudiced? Do you think that the Duke de L'Infantado would acknowledge this young gentleman's mother for his sister (particularly after what has passed) if she were not so?—That Captain Ashby should make his supposed son's birth tally with the date of his marriage, is all very likely,

though I am convinced that event preceded his marrying the young widow; but why you should so obstinately shut your eyes against conviction, I can't conceive."

"Your Lordship must excuse me," said the Colonel; "but positively I think my father's prejudices perfectly well founded; though I also think it very possible that Ferdinand Ashby may be supported in his imposition by his supposed uncles. As for the vast estates you say he has in the New World, or rather in South America, why they might as well have been placed in the moon; we should have ascertained the fact as easily in one place as in the other: though if they really do exist, they may have served him to bribe the Grandees, to whom he claims a relationship."

"Your surmises, Colonel, are still more improbable than your father's, as I believe the whole Continent of America

would

would prove insufficient to bribe a noble Castilian to acknowledge an alien to his blood; therefore let me advise you not to suffer prejudice to carry you too great lengths. I was in hopes that I had convinced both you and your father of the truth of my assertions; but since I have so totally failed, we had better drop the subject: though I am of opinion that a very short time will bring conviction to your minds. I only hope that your obstinacy will not be attended with any serious consequences; but for fear it should, I would advise you, Milford, to write to some of the gentlemen in office respecting the matter, and you, Colonel, can make the same enquiries of your brother-officers, whose arguments may prove of more avail in enforcing your belief of the Marquis of Almaviva's rank, than mine have done; though I should be very unworthy of the friendship with which his uncle honours me, if I had

 not

not endeavoured to convince you of your errors."

The Baronet was certain that, when Mr. Milford gave himself time for reflection, he would be convinced of the utter impossibility of any man of dubious character, being sent from any Court in an official capacity; adding—

"The Marquis of Almaviva was come over upon business of the utmost importance to both nations, which was a great proof of his diplomatic talents, as also of his near affinity to the Spanish Minister."

"Rather than argue the point any longer, Sir Henry," said the mortified Colonel, "we will allow him to be a demi-god—a descendant from Hercules in the direct line. I am sure he is big enough to warrant the supposition."

Though never less pleased, the Marquis affected

affected to laugh, and their arrival at Mr. Burton's prevented the subject from being renewed for a few minutes; but the great men had no sooner paid their compliments to the Mayor, and given him their proposed orders, which he assured them he should be proud to execute, than Milford said—

"Now pray, my old friend, who do you think Ferdinand Ashby has turned out to be at last?"

His Worship could not tell, though he acknowledged he should not be surprised to hear that he had done something he ought not to have done; for such large sums as he had sent his mother and Mr. Wildham, were not to be picked up at the end of every street.

Milford immediately repeated, in as few words as possible, the discovery which had so lately taken place, and had the

satisfaction of seeing the wise Magistrate shake his head, though he declared he did not doubt the Marquis of Stanmore's word; but the wisest and the greatest of men were sometimes imposed upon: indeed there was no being sufficiently upon one's guard; the world was getting worse and worse every day.

"Your remarks are perfectly just, Mr. Burton," observed the Marquis; "therefore, for the present, we will, with your's, and Mr. Milford's leave, wave the subject;" reverting himself to the approaching amusements.

Upon these Colonel Milford could converse with far greater pleasure, than upon Ferdinand's rank and perfections.

While, however, this noble party were at the Mayor's, Mrs. Hesham, who had heard enough to render her anxious to be in a dozen places at once, was flying from house to house, to repeat her strange story;

story; which, notwithstanding its incoherency, occasioned no small degree of anxiety among her hearers, to be at the bottom of this mysterious business. Some were sure, since the Marquis of Stanmore had said so much, that our hero must be the personage he represented him to be; others, siding with the Milfords, were still inclined to doubt.

There was, however, scarcely a person in the town who had ever spoke either to Wildham or Mrs. Ashby, who did not find some excuse to pay them a visit before night, in hopes of either seeing Ferdinand, or of learning something more concerning him; but most of them returned disappointed: for though Catherine gave them all audience in the neat kitchen, the door leading into the parlour remained constantly shut; and Wildham vowed he would put a padlock upon his outer door, if nothing else would keep them

them out; while Ferdinand was exceedingly amused to find himself thus become an object of general curiosity, declaring his intention of parading through every street the next morning, purposely to save the good people the trouble of racking their brains for an excuse to obtain admittance, and to prevent them from losing their time.

The indefatigable Mrs. Hesham was at her wits' end to discover every thing that was going forward at her opposite neighbour's; therefore hailed every person who came out, to hear what they had to say: when, to her infinite mortification, while she was cross-questioning some of these intruders, she perceived the Marquis of Stanmore entering Wildham's gate.

The parlour windows looked into a very neat garden at the back of the house, which was the pride of the old man's

man's heart; therefore it was impossible for her to see how he behaved to Mrs. Ashby. Twenty times was she tempted to grasp her crook, and follow him in, when she reflected that Wildham might take the opportunity to execute some of his former threats.

To remain, however, thus in suspense, was more than she could bear; she therefore hurried to Betty Thompson's, and sent her over.

Contrary to her usual alertness, Betty was gone best part of an hour. Had her employer given way to the impulse of the moment, she would have laid her crook about her when she did return; but as that might have prevented her from learning what was going forward over the way, she contented herself with observing that she thought she had taken up her quarters for the night at Wildham's.

"La, dear Mrs. Hesham, what a notion!—No, I staid to give Catherine a helping hand, for my Lord Marquis drank tea there, which I made, and Catherine carried it into the parlour; and I can assure you, every thing was quite in style, to what I should have expected; and the Marquis was as merry as a cricket. I heard him and Mr. Ferdinand, or my Lord, I should say, though I can't speak his name, laughing like any thing; and had Mrs Ashby been Queen of England, he could not have treated her with greater respect, Kitty told me; and old Wildham was as much at home as any body.

"I should have been back sooner, but I stopped to drink a few dishes of tea with Kitty; for I don't get gunpowder tea and double-refined sugar every day. However, God bless them with it, I say; for they make a good use of their money, and are not above speaking to a poor body.

"But

"But I have not told you all yet; for while Kitty and I were enjoying ourselves over this precious good tea, Mr. Ferdinand came out of the parlour, to go up stairs, to fetch something to shew the Marquis; so I got up, to be sure.

'Catherine, my dear,' he cried, 'if I derange any of your friends, I shall be very sorry.'

"So she told him who I was, and he came up to me, and shook me by the hand, declaring he was very glad to see me; so I made bold to say he was welcome home:—and could you believe it, he put his hand into his pocket, and gave me five golden guineas, to buy me a ribbon. Well, pray God bless him, and every one belonging to him, say I."

"Aye, aye, Betty; speak well of the bridge that carries you safe over; but you have detained me so long, I must be going;"—and it may be supposed that the Marquis of Stanmore's condescension, the

gunpowder

gunpowder tea, &c. &c. and Betty Thompson's present, which no one envied her so much as she did, was known from one end of the town to the other, before noon the next day.

CHAP. VII.

THE Marquis of Stanmore and Sir Henry left —— the following morning, where our hero's pretensions to the title of Almaviva were warmly debated for the three succeeding days, during which Milford wrote to a great man in office, to whom he kindly imparted every thing

he knew respecting Ferdinand, in hopes that his communications would suffice to deprive him of the rank he now held at the British Court, which rendered him such an object of envy to the Colonel; who also wrote to the same effect, to those of his brother-officers, with whom he was sufficiently intimate, as the young Nobles who serve in that respectable corps, despised the arrogant fellow too sincerely, to be upon friendly terms with him.

That an Extraordinary Ambassador from the Court of Madrid, was now in England, and had been presented at St. James's, both the Merchant and his son had learned from the newspapers, with many of the particulars respecting his relationship to the Prime Minister at Madrid, and to the Viceroy of Mexico. This the Marquis of Stanmore had recapitulated to them; nevertheless, that this great

great man should be Ferdinand Ashby, they were resolved not to believe; therefore assured every body who asked their opinion upon the matter, that the Marquis of Stanmore must have been imposed upon; forgetting, we presume, that that Nobleman had told them he had seen Ferdinand at Court, and kindly prognosticating that Ashby would sculk off some night, to avoid his approaching detection.

Yet appearances were daily more in favour of the now object of their aversion.—Two maid-servants were engaged to assist Catherine, who continued, as usual, to superintend the household department; and on the fourth morning after the discovery of our hero's rank had taken place, a very elegant town-chariot, and six fine horses, bred on the fertile plains of Andelusia, stopped at Wildham's door. This elegant equipage, which even surpassed the one Colonel Milford sported, which

which had hitherto been the admiration of ——, was followed by four outriders, one of whom led a very fine horse, also a native of the banks of the Guadalquiver.

A gentleman, as Mrs. Hesham thought, about four or five-and-twenty, alighted from the chariot, from which, to her increasing astonishment, he assisted in taking a great deal of baggage; and then, accompanied by one of the maids, he preceded the carriage and other servants to the best inn. This the curious old gossip had no difficulty in discovering, as she followed them thither, and saw him and the girl come out again, and retrace their steps homewards. Into the inn-yard, therefore, she boldly sallied.

The hostler and stable people were all busily employed, while the coachman, postillion, footmen, and grooms were issuing their orders in a more peremptory manner than

than their Lord would probably have done.

Heraldry, notwithstanding her boasted descent, was not a science Mrs. Hesham had studied; but she was sufficiently versed in it to distinguish the Marquis's coronet upon the panels of the carriage, and upon the glittering harness.

Addressing one of the servants, she enquired to whom this elegant equipage belonged.

"To His Excellency the Marquis Almaviva," was the reply.

"And that beautiful horse?" pointing to one a groom had led.

She received the same answer, and was finally told that they had the honour to serve His Excellency, and that it was his first gentleman whom they had brought down.

Fully

Fully satisfied, away she posted to the Milfords, where she declared the great man's servants reminded her of "Mother Goose's Tale of Puss in Boots;" since every thing, as in that story, belonged to *His Excellency the Marquis Almaviva.* But her intelligence was not received by these great folks, with their accustomed satisfaction; as the arrival of this superb equipage, and such a suite of servants, appeared to them to be proofs, strong as holy writ, of the master's rank; and, to their increasing mortification, they on this very day received answers to the letters they had written to London, in which the doubts they had expressed respecting Ferdinand, were treated as absurd; their correspondent very properly observing that his official capacity ought to have done them all away.

The gentleman whom the Merchant had addressed, entered into more details than

than the Colonel's brother officers had done, who seemed rather to wish to increase his perplexity, than to afford him any information, he being by no means liked by the corps. But the assistant of Ministers wrote his father, that the Spanish Ambassador made no scruple of saying that Donna Seraphina di Mendoza, the Marquis's mother, had formed a very improper connection after her departure from Spain; therefore, in his opinion, the Marquis's condescension in visiting her, was the more meritorious, as none of her own, or her first husband's family, would probably have paid her the same compliment, though they were all of them dotingly fond of her son, whom they considered as the future representative of the two first families in Spain; in which light he hoped that Mr. Milford would now be inclined to consider him, as in whatever situation he might have known him, it was now necessary

necessary to pay him that respect due to his acknowledged rank, and still more to his official capacity.

" The Ministers appear to have imbibed Lord Stanmore's prejudices in favour of this young man," remarked the Merchant, as he handed the letter to his son.

" Since he has been received at St. James's, we must support his pretensions," replied the Colonel. " As it should appear he does not want for money, why he may be able to carry on the farce rather longer than we expected; but that it will finally end in his disgrace, may be safely foretold."

So said Mrs. Hesham, who vowed it should go hard with her, if she was not at the bottom of this mystery before the end of another week.

If the fellow was the great man some people thought him to be, he would clear

up

up the doubts he must know every one entertained respecting him; instead of which, he appeared to enjoy keeping every body in the dark, and concealment of any kind, in her opinion, always amounted to proof positive, that there was something not much to the person's honour at the bottom. Besides, would not Mrs. Ashby, who God knew was not deficient in pride, clear up the strange story respecting her having had two husbands at once, if she knew how?"

Never had the Merchant or his son listened with so much satisfaction to her prate; declaring she reasoned far better upon the subject, than even the great Lord Stanmore.

Within two days, the first ball was to take place; Mrs. Milford therefore supposed Ashby meant to shew himself there. The Colonel vowed he would take the liberty of shewing him the door, except, indeed

indeed, he was protected in his insolence by Lord Stanmore.

"That you may depend upon it he will, Robert; but at all events, after the letter I have received, we must affect to suppose him Marquis of Almaviva."

"You may do as you please, Sir; but I am not so easily duped: nor shall I shew Tom Ashby's son any respect, till I have had some farther proofs of his Nobility."

So saying, he left the room, while Mrs. Hesham hastened to describe the superb equipage, &c. &c. in every house where she could gain admittance. But as if, as she had observed, our hero had enjoyed perplexing the inhabitants of ——, he paid no visits, nor did he receive any; and Wildham, in reply to the perpetual questions with which he was assailed, referred the enquirers to Mrs. Ashby, or the Marquis of Almaviva, who were

were much better able to satisfy them than he was.

"But did he believe the latter was a Lord?"

"As firmly as he did his creed; nay, he had even known he was one before he left ——."

"Well, that was wonderful!"

But when this was reported to the Milfords by *the Walking Gazette*, alias Mrs. Hesham, they were only amazed that the curious fools could not see Wildham was laughing at them.

From the servants, little could be learned, as they (the valet excepted) had all been hired in London, where they had left several Spaniards, and two Mexicans, who had come over with their master, with whom they hoped to return to Spain, from whence they said the horses (which excited general admiration) came, having been presented to the Marquis by his Sovereign, which had induced him to

brin

bring them over. The valet was a Spaniard, but as uncommunicative as his master, though he spoke very good English; in vain, therefore, did Mrs. Hesham set her wits to work, as she was doomed, like every one else, to continue in suspense; sometimes doubting, and sometimes believing that our hero would be able to make good his claims to Nobility.

On the morning preceding the ball, this much-envied enigmatical mortal took a stroll upon the sands. The tide was a good way out, and he walked on to the water's edge, having a very great partiality to the various sublime prospects he thought the ocean afforded. The tide was slowly coming in, while he was standing reflecting deeply upon the past, when, in casting his eyes towards the left, he perceived, upon a neck of land, about a mile from him, two people advancing on horseback.

This was a road which was often taken at low water, as it was much the nearest cut from a village rather higher upon the coast, and it was seldom unsafe to cross the little stream, which separated him from the equestrians, except there was an unusual fresh or swell of the sea, which never occurred but at spring-tides; but there were times, when the tide was upon the ebb, that the quicksands on the other side were really dangerous, even to those who were aware of them.

These ideas did not, however, come across our hero, who was too fearless himself to consider whether he always chose the safest paths; nor indeed was there any thing to fear on his side of the current. He therefore slowly retreated as the tide advanced, contemplating the vast expanse before him; every now and then turning his eyes to the left, and at last he very plainly discerned a lady on horseback, followed by a servant; and as he knew

knew they must cross the stream, about a hundred yards from where he then was, he walked that way, still considering the fair Amazon, who he thought set her horse, in a hand canter, with infinite grace, when, to his infinite dismay, the poor animal suddenly plunged into one of the dangerous quicksands already mentioned.

The servant's horse, which was not more than twenty paces behind, started upon perceiving what had befallen his companion; and instantly turning round, in spite of every effort of his rider to prevent him, set off back again as hard as he could gallop; while the one that was in the sand, kept plunging with all his might; and he could hear the lady's screams for assistance, which her servant was totally incapacitated from affording her. Without any farther reflection, our hero plunged into the stream, already more

 than

than three feet deep, and made the best of his way towards her, as the danger increased every succeeding moment, owing to the now rapid approach of the tide.

But before he got near her, finding her horse was unable to extricate himself, she had endeavoured to alight; owing, however, to her terror, she had not been able to disengage her foot from the stirrup. She had therefore fallen upon her face, and was being dragged about, every plunge the creature took; and had not our hero chanced to have seen the accident, a few minutes would most probably have terminated the existence of both: as a less courageous man would have been very loath to have stepped upon the quivering sand, which even he did with the utmost caution, taking care not to stand still for a single moment.

Having seen what was the lady's situation,

tion, he had got his penknife in his hand, with which he instantly cut the stirrup-leather; and then catching hold of her habit, he dragged her after him, till they were once more upon solid ground, when he immediately raised her in his arms, but was then unable to see her face, as she was literally covered with sand, and her very mouth was full. But she soon shewed signs of recollection and presence of mind; for while she was endeavouring to wipe some of the sandy mud from her eyes, &c. before she could speak, she made a sign to her deliverer, to go to the assistance of her horse, which he instantly did; and having cut the girths of the saddle, he seized the lady's whip, encouraging the terrified animal to assist his efforts, till he finally had the satisfaction of seeing him also out of danger.

By this time the lady had recovered both the use of her legs and tongue, though she did not look to much greater

 advantage

advantage than when our hero had left her, who now joined her, holding the bridle of her steed in one hand, and her saddle in the other;—she nevertheless endeavoured to express her thanks, for his timely assistance; and, looking round, asked what had become of her servant. Ferdinand pointed him out at a considerable distance, relating what had compelled him to abandon her to her fate, observing that he was now galloping back, even faster than the horse had carried him away.

"Notwithstanding his haste, I am convinced he would have been too late to have saved my life, my kind preserver," replied the lady; "but for Heaven's sake, do not now let me detain you a moment longer.—I cannot go into the town such a figure, nor do I know to whom I am obliged for my existence; but who-r you are, accept my sincere thanks; and

and if I can in any way return the obligation you have conferred upon me, only put me to the test; for, believe me, neither the means nor the will are wanting. You will soon learn who, but for your incredible exertions, would have made so shabby an exit; therefore, for the present, fare you well! Here is my servant, and I really blush for my appearance; though the mud, with which I am so completely covered, conceals my confusion."

"I am very happy to find that you are able to laugh at your misfortune, Ma'am; but I never could bear to do any thing by halves:—suffer me, therefore, to see you to a place of safety before I return to ——; as I am in no danger of feeling any inconvenience from my wet clothes, sea water never having any bad effects. Your kind offers were, I am convinced, perfectly sincere; therefore I feel myself to the full as much obliged, as were I in need of any favour you have it in your power

power to bestow; though I may, should we ever meet again, perhaps sue to be admitted among the number of your friends, if I am not even more presumptuous."

The lady instantly took his hint, gaily observing that their's was certainly a novel adventure.

The servant, who had been dreadfully alarmed for his mistress, broke in upon their discourse, by endeavouring to excuse himself for having done what it was not in his power to prevent.

"I know you were not at all to blame, William," she replied; "so put my saddle on again as quick as possible, that I may ride home as fast as my terrified horse can carry me."

"Then dare you mount again, Madam?" asked our hero.

"Undoubt-

"Undoubtedly; the poor beast trembles still but he will carry me very safely, I am convinced: and I shall not take the shortest cut back again, for fear of a second misfortune, as one does not meet with brave knight-errants at every turning. I was told I should be too late, but fancied myself wiser than my advisers, so I have only paid for my obstinacy; therefore had I been the only sufferer, I should not have repined."

The groom, having taken a girth from his own saddle, soon replaced his mistress's, who, after renewing her thanks to our hero in the strongest terms, put her foot into her servant's hand, and vaulted once more upon the back of her steed, upon which she galloped away, as if nothing had befallen her.

"This is a very curious adventure," thought our hero, following her with his eyes; till having lost sight of her, he

 retraced

retraced his steps homewards, but was this time obliged to wade through the stream, nearly up to his chin in water; and being already so much an object of general curiosity, it may be supposed that he was not a little stared at by the few people he met upon his road home, having taken the most private streets, not wishing to be seen in such a dripping state. But at the very last turning, he chanced to stumble upon Mrs. Hesham, who, being upon one of her usual errands, ran against him, in her haste to propagate what she had learned through the means of Betty Thompson—namely, that all his letters came and went express to London.

Her hands were, however, upon him, before she saw who had impeded her progress; and she was beginning to blame the fellow for his awkwardness, when she met the eyes of the master of the superb equipage, which had rendered him more

than

than ever the object of Colonel Milford's envy and dislike; and actually screamed aloud as she started back, shaking her hands, while she looked him stedfastly in the face. Her evident astonishment and queer gestures made Ferdinand smile, while he begged ten thousand pardons for having so unintentionally alarmed her; picking up and restoring her favourite crook, which she had dropped in her surprise. Having soon recovered her speech, she exclaimed—

"Mercy upon me, Ashby! where have you been? Who has been flinging you into the water?—What, you have affronted somebody, who does not put more faith in your greatness than I do!—Am not I right?—for you look half drowned; though you seem to have got the better of the fright I suppose you have been in!"

"That Mrs. Hesham should ever be mistaken in her charitable conjectures, is

 wonderful!"

wonderful!" replied our hero. "But though many people may, like yourself, fancy that my title only exists in my own imagination, yet I do not think that they would have found it a very easy task to have flung me into the sea as you suppose, by way of washing it out of my head.—The fact is, I have been taking a cold bath this morning, and, for decency's sake, with my clothes on."

As even to see Ferdinand Ashby, was now become a matter of moment, many heads were out of the neighbouring windows, and many people were standing at their doors, looking after him, who all darted forward the moment he was stopped, hoping they should learn what had occasioned his dripping appearance, since Mrs. Hesham had accosted him: therefore, in a few seconds they were absolutely surrounded. But not finding himself at all inclined to prolong his conver-

conversation with the curious old woman, nor to answer any of the impertinent questions he thought himself likely to be assailed with, he abruptly left the gazing crowd to form their own conjectures, while he hastened home; and Mrs. Hesham, though by no means satisfied respecting his appearance, hurried to Mr. Milford's, where she rather hoped to have it satisfactorily accounted for, thinking it not impossible that he was indebted for his wet jacket to the Colonel; forgetting how very unequal that gentleman was to the task she had assigned him.

He was not at home, she learned from the servant; therefore she had no sooner gone through the usual necessary routine of unmeaning compliments, ere she exclaimed—

"I would lay any wager that the Colonel has met with *His Excellency the Spanish Marquis* this morning, and has,

by way of teaching him humility, flung him into the sea; and had he been drowned, Margaret Hesham would not have been among the mourners, except indeed the Colonel had got into any trouble upon his account," repeating where she had met him, and in what situation.

Unlikely as were her conjectures, the Merchant, flattered by the opinion she seemed to entertain of his son's prowess, agreed that there might be some truth in the supposition, though he hoped that Robert had not been so rash, nor that——

The Colonel's entrance interrupted his speech; but when informed how they supposed he had been employed, he declared that he had neither seen nor heard of the fellow, enquiring the various particulars. Then how came he in the situation Mrs. Hesham had seen him in?—

This

This they were all eager to fathom. If he had been bathing, as he said, the Merchant protested he should be tempted to think him insane.

"I think it very possible, Sir," said the Colonel, "that his imagined greatness may have deranged his weak brain;" while the spinster vowed that she would know all how and about it, even if she bribed one of the lately hired maids; striding away for that purpose, promising a speedy return.

In vain, however, she flew from house to house, among the inferior professors of her trade. No one could satisfy her inordinate curiosity, which was greatly increased by these difficulties. At last she retraced her steps to the very place where she had so unexpectedly met our hero; and there, by dint of enquiries, she discovered which way he had come into town—nay, she even met with a man who

who had seen him wading through the stream homewards; but whether owing to choice or necessity, he could not determine: though as to his being thrown in, that he could not believe, as there were not many two men in —— able to perform such a feat; for Mr. or as some people called him, My Lord Ashby, would not be very easily mastered; besides, neither his hat nor his hair were wet, when he saw him.

All this was very unsatisfactory to his auditor, who, as she was returning home, to dispatch her trusty scout, Betty Thompson, met Wildham, to whom she instantly put the question, whether Ashby was in his right senses; relating where she had met him, and what had passed between them.

The good old man had not been home, therefore was rather alarmed by her strange intelligence; but concealing his

his fears, he told her it was very common for Noblemen in Spain to bathe as he had done; there was consequently nothing astonishing in what appeared so greatly to have surprised her:—and thus she was obliged to rest satisfied for the present, as Wildham hurried home, to learn what had really befallen his young friend; whose courage and humanity he could not sufficiently extol, when he heard that he had saved the life of a fellow-creature, at the imminent hazard of his own.

Their joint rencontres with Mrs. Hesham highly amused them, as they were sensible the state of perplexity she was now in, must be particularly irksome to a person of her disposition. Wildham feared she would very soon learn the truth; though neither he, Mrs. Ashby, nor Catherine had any idea who the rash equestrian was, from the very imperfect description Ferdinand was able to give them,

them of her, and from their never having been in habits of intercourse with any of the neighbouring gentry

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CHAP. VIII.

THE ball day at length arrived without any thing farther having transpired, either to prove that our hero was, or was not, Captain Ashby's son; upon which point being satisfactorily cleared, rested, in the Milfords' opinion, all his claims to greatness, which the Colonel, with affected gaiety, protested Mrs. Hesham had very ably defined, when she had

had compared him to the Marquis of Carabas, in "Puss in Boots;" having actually (strange to relate!) purchased "Mother Goose's Tales," merely to peruse that story, in hopes it would afford him an opportunity of exercising his spleen, which he misnamed wit, at the expence of a man whom he could not forgive being born either a greater, or, at all events, a more fortunate man than himself.

His father's friends affected to entertain the same doubts the Merchant continued to avow respecting our hero; though, but for the unpleasant circumstances which had taken place during their first meeting, Milford would have suffered himself to have been convinced of the possibility that there existed of the Marquis of Stanmore's and the Minister's being better informed respecting the matter, than he could possibly be; but so *absurd an idea* would never have entered

entered the Colonel's head, who maintained that a very short time would suffice to bring even those gentlemen over to his way of thinking.

The poorer inhabitants of —— did not enter into the subtilty of argument employed by these gentlemen, to lower Ferdinand in every body's opinion; they only declared that he had visited all his former acquaintance, to whom he had made the most noble presents: nor had he been regardless of any one's claim to his bounty, who was really in distress. Blessings therefore now followed his steps wherever he went; and there was not a sailor's nor a fisherman's wife in the place, who would not have been cut to mince-meat in support of his rights. Not that Mrs. Hesham was equally industrious in reporting his charitable actions, the shoe rather pinching her own foot; for she now found that, had she followed the example of his poorer friends,

in sincerely welcoming his return among them, she might, like Betty Thompson, though, doubtless, in a greater degree, have participated in his liberality, which, as matters stood, appeared to her both absurd and ill-judged, and only served to increase the dislike, or rather hatred, the Milfords now bore him; who were not fond of hearing any body (themselves excepted) praised, and much less those of a person so much the object of their aversion: and on the very evening preceding the expected gala, the Merchant vowed that even were King George the Third to assure him that Ferdinand Ashby was every thing he pretended to be, he would never sit him down at his table, as he should always remember that he was once indebted to his charity, for the very means of existence. The Marquis of Stanmore might act as he thought proper; at the same time, that Nobleman had best not provoke him, lest he

he should start his son against Sir Henry, though he had rather remain friends with all his neighbours, as he wished to be nearer related to two such respectable families; but vowed that, should any thing intervene to prevent the match, upon which his heart was fixed, he would convince the great men that he possessed some influence amongst the freeholders and burghers of ——.

Upon these annual galas, his house was generally crowded with company. The Marquis and Sir Henry were to dine with him the first day, but were engaged to take up their abode at another friend's. Miss Deloraine, her cousin, and several other ladies were to accompany them to ——, but were not to be of the first dinner party at the Merchant's, who, ever anxious to display his riches, never gratified his ruling passion more, than when entertaining his superiors, whom he

he compelled to acknowledge that he kept an excellent table, and that his cellars were stored with the choicest wines.

The Marquis had hitherto, having been frequently his guest before, generally made it very late before he reached ——; but on this day he looked in upon Milford soon after one, asking how he did, observing that he had several visits to pay before he sat down to his toilet, so had called, *en passant*, to enquire after him and Mrs. Milford.

The Merchant, who rather supposed where he was going, took the opportunity to enquire whether his Lordship thought the *Spanish Grandee*, whom they had rather differed about, the last time they met, would be at the ball in the evening.

"At present I cannot resolve your question,

question, Mr. Milford, though I should hope that he will honour us with his company; but you do not yet seem to be convinced that he is, as I represented him, a man of the first family and fortune."

"No, indeed, my Lord, no offence to you; nor do I think I ever shall, while I remember him almost a beggar in these streets."

"I could not have supposed that you would have suffered yourself to be thus blinded by prejudice, Mr. Milford; however I am going to pay my respects to the man you certainly only affect to despise.—When I return, I shall be able to inform you whether we are to see him in the evening;" leaving the angry Milford to reflect at leisure upon what he had said.

"Honour us with his company!" he repeated, as soon as his Lordship was out of hearing.—"Well, I will keep my

temper

temper if I can, though I have no patience with the Marquis; nay, I wish I may not affront him before the week is out. He certainly expected I should have invited the upstart mushroom to have dined here; but if ever he either eats or drinks in my house, since he was above associating with his equal, and former friend, Thomas, why my name is not Robert Milford, nor am I worth half a million—that is all!"

Such was the splenetic Merchant's soliloquy, while the Marquis of Stanmore was hastening to Wildham's, being more than ever anxious to convince our hero that he entertained none of those doubts Milford still chose to avow, and to request that he would grace their ball with his presence; though he was exceedingly angry to find that he had not been invited in form by the Mayor and Corporation—a compliment, considering his official capacity, that he was fully entitled

to expect, and which he was resolved should be paid him, if he had any influence among that body: though he had reserved a ticket for him, in case these gentlemen should have been, as he rather feared, deficient in point of respect to the Representative of His Most Catholic Majesty, of whose rights and privileges he was now grown very tenacious.

Ferdinand was fortunately at home, and very happy to see the Marquis, to whom he now thought it necessary to enter into those details he had intended to have related to the Milfords, to the infinite gratification, and great amusement of the Peer; and, as it is our wish to amuse our readers, we will, ere long, be equally communicative to them: for the present, therefore, they must content themselves with participating in the suspense of the Milfords, &c. &c.

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The Marquis was rejoiced to find our hero so ready to laugh at the doubts his own silence certainly helped to keep alive; but having assured him that he would very soon be invited with all due form and etiquette, he hoped he meant to favour them with his company at the ball in the evening; adding—

"If you wish still to preserve your *incognito*, here is a ticket which I purposely reserved for you; and I will prevent your being invited *en ceremonie* by the Members and the Corporation."

"If I do go, Marquis," rejoined our hero, "I must not afford even the great Milfords an opportunity of affronting my Sovereign in my person; therefore, much as I shall regret it, I must, if I appear in public, lay aside my *incognito*; and while so many absurd stories respecting me are in circulation, my staying away might be attributed to fear, or to various motives equally devoid of foundation."

"'You are perfectly right, my friend; and it shall be my care to prevent your having any reason to repent acceding to my wishes. Indeed, I would not have taken a refusal; for a great many of my friends have come to ——, on purpose to be introduced to you. I will therefore, with your leave, call upon you between six and seven this evening:—the inhabitants of —— are early folks; and from hence we can proceed together to the scene of action."

"Agreed, Marquis; you shall find me in readiness;" and thus they parted.

Mrs. Hesham had watched his Lordship into Wildham's, though, to her great chagrin, he did not look up at her window as he passed; but by no means willing to construe his neglect into a wish to slight a person of her family, she consoled herself with the certainty that he would remember her as he came out.

It

It was between one and two when he entered; and the good lady being engaged to dine at three at the Mayor's, was already full dressed for her visit, and sat with her casement open till the clock had actually struck three, without seeing any thing of the Marquis; though she knew the Milfords were to dine an hour earlier than usual, on account of the ball, and his Lordship was not dressed for his evening's entertainment. She was therefore very undecided what to do, whether to remain, at the risk of losing a good dinner, or to give up all thoughts of a bow from Lord Stanmore. At last she thought it wisest to lose her chance of the latter; so set off for the Mayor's, wondering what could thus detain him, and more than half convinced, though very much against her will, that *Scapegrace* was the great man every thing proclaimed him to be.

She had excuses to make for coming

in after the company was seated at table; but took an opportunity of whispering to Mrs. Burton what had detained her, who could not blame her for her delay: though she would have been better pleased, had she brought word whether this young man, who continued to afford conversation for the whole town, would be at the ball.

Mrs. Hesham had not been long gone, when the Marquis bade our hero adieu; and immediately hastening to Mr. Milford's, where he had agreed to dress, told Sir Henry Deloraine, who was just arrived there, it would be proper that an invitation, in the name of the Members, and the Mayor and Corporation of — —, should be immediately sent to the Marquis of Almaviva, who would certainly not otherwise honour them with his company in the evening.

" Then your Lordship means publicly to

to acknowledge him to be the Spanish Ambassador?" said the displeased Milford.

"I do, Sir; and I think the rank I hold in this county, of which I am Lord Lieutenant, authorizes me to insist upon every proper mark of respect being paid to the Representative of a Prince, in alliance with the Court of Great Britain."

"I will write whatever you dictate," rejoined the Baronet, "and will set Mr. Milford the example of signing it. I will then wait upon the Mayor and the Aldermen upon the business, as I mean to be the bearer of the invitation myself."

"You are perfectly right, Sir Henry," was the reply.—"We display our regard for our own most gracious Monarch, by honouring the Representatives of others."

A most polite letter of invitation was in consequence written and signed by the Baronet, to which Mr. Milford, as one of the Body Corporate (being an

 Alderman),

Alderman), having left a sufficient space for the Mayor to affix his signature, was obliged, very much against his will, and solely to avoid coming to an open rupture with his guest, to affix his own.

Sir Henry immediately hurried away to Burton's, who was holding forth very learnedly, to prove the impossibility of Tom Ashby's son being half so great as report made him out; when his footman whispered to him that Sir Henry Deloraine was in another room, and wished to speak to him.

"Sir Henry Deloraine!" he cried, flinging down his knife and fork, and starting up, being in the middle of dinner, and without any apology to his guests, abruptly left the room; and upon being informed why he had been thus deranged, he instantly complied with the Baronet's wishes, and even offered to send the letter round to all the Body Corporate,

Corporate, and finally to have it delivered by whoever Sir Henry thought fit for the office.

This the Baronet declined; but having fully impressed him with a sense of Ferdinand's rank, and given him very clearly to understand what might be the consequence of any failure, in respect to etiquette upon this occasion, he hastened to the other gentlemen's, who were all equally eager to display their respect, and to believe every thing that he asserted; and, finally, he waited upon our hero with the precious morsel, and was only sorry that Mr. Milford's dinner hour did not allow him to prolong his visit, as he found him every thing the Marquis of Stanmore had represented him to be, and could only pity the Milfords for their ill-founded prejudices.

But the Colonel and his father were of that denomination of men, who find it

impossible to enjoy the success of others, and who mark out every man for hatred, whose fame or fortune they believe increasing: and to see this despised object of the Merchant's former ostentatious——what shall we term it?—surely not charity——considered in the light Lord Stanmore held him up to public view, was perhaps among the most severe mortifications they had ever experienced; particularly when they discovered that both that Nobleman and Sir Henry entertained the highest idea of our hero's talents, judgment, and principles: though the Merchant more than once reflected that he might have taken some degree of honour upon the occasion to himself, had he been equally inclined to have done him justice; but during dinner, Sir Henry took occasion to observe that the Marquis of Almaviva spoke so unaffectedly the real dictates of his heart, that truth and virtue, which never want,

and seldom wear ornaments, seemed only to borrow his voice:—he was therefore convinced that he must make every one his convert, with whom he took the trouble to argue.

"Since he is so eloquent an orator," said the Colonel, in an ironical tone, "'tis a pity his being a foreigner prevents him from obtaining a seat in our House of Commons."

"Fortunately his shining abilities are still better employed," retorted the Marquis; "though I make no doubt but that he would have been a first rate speaker in St. Stephen's Chapel. But do you think, Sir Henry, he has, in the highest degree, the air, manners, and address of a man of rank, politeness with ease, and dignity without pride?"

"Of that I am not so good a judge as your Lordship; I only know he gained my esteem during our very short interview—he appeared so perfectly to

understand what was due to his public character, and yet to be so perfectly unassuming upon his own account: in short, to speak my real opinion of him, in three words—he is a man after my own heart."

Never before was the Colonel so sensible of the hatred he bore the unoffending Ferdinand, whose praises he considered as insults to himself; therefore, to avoid hearing any more of his eulogiums, he abruptly left the company, to pay his devoirs to Miss Deloraine, who, with her cousin, had dined at a near neighbour's of his father, where they were, as well as the Marquis and Sir Henry, to reside during the festive season; their host seldom visiting ——, except upon such occasions.

CHAP.

CHAP. IX.

LET us now return to the Mayor's, who rejoined his company the moment he parted from the Baronet; and being now as anxious to convince his guests how much Ferdinand was entitled to their respect, as he had been, before Sir Henry's visit, to dispute that very point, assuming an unusual knowing look, he exclaimed—

"After all, good folks, mark me—I don't say but what we may all be deceived in our opinion of this here young gentleman,

man, whom we were talking about when I left the room. Mr. Milford's story was all very good, till one had heard what other folks had got to say; but now I am inclined to think that he is a great —aye, a very great man, and that he ought to be treated as such, till any one can step forward, and prove that he is merely imposing upon us."

"Why, did he come with Sir Henry Deloraine, my dear?" asked Mrs. Burton.

"No, child; nor do I say that Sir Henry came to tell me any thing about the Spanish Ambassador."

"What, then, do you believe, Mr. Burton, *Nandy Ashby* came over in that capacity?" asked Mrs. Hesham, whose anxiety was visible.

"That is neither here nor there, Madam; but mark me, if he should, after all (and I see nothing impossible in the matter) be an Ambassador, why I am not sure whether it may not be deemed high

treason

treason to affront him: I shall therefore take every precaution which my official situation authorizes, to prevent his having any reason for complaint, since I find he is to be at the ball. Indeed I am a party concerned in the invitation he has received, and I shall caution all my acquaintance to be upon their guard in addressing him; for I positively would not have him called Ashby for half my fortune: indeed there is no knowing what might be the consequence of his receiving such an insult."

"Ah, ha, neighbour Burton!" cried the spinster, "you have let the cat out of the bag!—Sir Henry was sent by the Marquis of Stanmore, on purpose to fill you up with notions of this fellow's greatness, merely to induce you to countenance his pretensions to rank and precedence; because, my Lord, forsooth, has taken him under his protection!—Well, well, *mark me*—to repeat your own words—I say *Nandy Ashby* will make you all his dupes,

dupes, and then laugh at you for your credulity; for I will maintain that his gentleman, as he is called, is more deserving of the appellation than his master: indeed I should not be astonished if it was to come out that they are master and servant in turn. Be that as it may, Mr. Gonsalvo, as they call him, is a very polite young man; for give even the devil his due, has always been one of my maxims."

"What, then you have spoken to the servant?" said the Mayor, whose doubts rather revived, till he reflected that the Marquis of Stanmore would never render himself ridiculous by asserting the rights of an impostor.

"Yes, if he had not happened to have been in great haste, I should have known a little more respecting his master; so let me alone for sifting him to the bottom. I will have chapter and verse respecting his *Lord*, as he calls him, before this day week."

"I give you credit for your dexterity, *neighbour* Hesham," replied the Magistrate, having been rather piqued at her familiar address; "but, meanwhile, I desire you would keep a guard upon your tongue, either when speaking to, or of the Marquis——plague of his name!—it has escaped my memory!"

"He styles himself Marquis of Almaviva, Mr. Burton; and give me leave to tell you, I know how to address even men of greater consequence, and that no real gentleman ever takes offence at what falls from a lady's mouth."

"Then your sex may be your protection, old lady; but as you value my friendship, don't shew the Marquis any of your quality airs, because your affronting him will offend me: and I am of opinion your pedigree won't console you for the many good meals you will lose by that bargain."

"Bless us, and save us! Mr. Burton, why your opinion of *Nandy Ashby* has undergone

undergone a strange alteration since you began dinner!—so do set all our minds at ease at once, that we may know what we are about!—What has the Baronet been telling you?—for till I am perfectly convinced of his right to the title, I shall not call him *my Lord*; nay, even then I shall never be able to forget who he was."

"It don't signify a pin's point, Mrs. Hesham, what a man has been:—tell me what he is; and if he has risen in the world by his industry or his talents, why it is all the more honourable. However, I foresee we shall have a fine crowd at the ball to-night. I wish it may not be necessary to swear in a few additional constables, to keep the servants in order; for I dare say all the world and his wife will be there, to see the *stranger at home.*"

The ladies having at last retired, his Worship in confidence repeated to his male

male guests all that had passed between him and Sir Henry, declaring he was not sorry Ashby had risen thus in the world, as he knew nothing could be more mortifying to the Milfords: therefore if it was only to work them, he would be all civility to the young Lord; because nobody could laugh at him for following the Marquis of Stanmore's lead, who, as well as Sir Henry Deloraine, had visited Ashby.

"Then you ought to pay him the same compliment, Mr. Mayor," said one of the gentlemen present, like himself, in a large line of business.

"Why, I was thinking of sending Deborah—(his wife)—in the coach, to ask him and his mother to drink a dish of tea with us, and to accompany us to the ball. I wish I had asked Sir Henry whether it would be doing right."

"You cannot do wrong in being polite to the young man, who seems to have

have been born with a silver spoon in his mouth."

"Yes, yes, neighbour; he has verified the old proverb—' 'tis better to be born lucky than rich.'—But I will go and dispatch Deb;" whom he called from her company for that purpose, to inform her why he had been deranged during dinner, and what he wished her to do in consequence of what Sir Henry Deloraine had said.

Mrs. Burton was no less ready to pay all due respect to this great man; hinting that it might not be amiss, if his rank was confirmed, to give him a dinner during his stay, just to mortify the Milfords, whom they would invite to meet him; because, though to treat them in their own style, would be attended with no small expence, yet there was every reason to hope that Ferdinand would repay them in meal or in malt: but, for the present, she would content herself with

with endeavouring to procure his company to tea.

Burton approved of all she said, giving orders for the coach to convey her to Wildham's, while she returned to inform her lady guests where she was going, and upon what errand; declaring, that now she was convinced the stranger had a right to such a mark of respect, she would neither give him nor his mother room to complain of her want of politeness.

Two other ladies, her particular friends, begged to be of the party; and Mrs. Hesham after several significant shrugs of her shoulders, and sagacious nods addressed to the rest of the company, requested to make the fourth in the coach; hinting that, no doubt, the Marquis, since such he was, would make use of his own carriage, if he did accept the invitation. Away therefore they drove.

The

The meddling old gossip's curiosity had induced her to join the party, that she might be able to give the Milfords an exact account of Mrs. Burton's behaviour; who, fearful her apparent condescension might lower her in the eyes of her companions, told them what had passed between the Baronet and her husband. Mrs. Hesham hoped Sir Henry had not suffered himself to be deceived. The Mayoress took fire at the bare surmise, when fortunately their arrival at Wildham's put a stop to the altercation.

The good man was entering his gate, when his Worship's coach drew up, which induced him to turn round, to assist the ladies in alighting; Mrs. Burton immediately enquiring whether the Marquis and his mother wer e at home.

Guessing to what cause Mrs. Ashby was indebted for this visit, he replied in the affirmative, ushering in the smart

smart group, who were all adorned in silks of a sufficiently thick texture to have been transmitted from mother to daughter, for at least five generations. Mrs. Hesham's in particular had been, as she said, her great-grandmother's court-dress; of course she deemed it invaluable.

Mrs. Ashby and Catherine (who was one of the best intentioned, and most unassuming good creatures in the world) were together in the parlour, and were even more astonished than their host, when he introduced these unexpected visitors; and their surprise increased when Mrs. Burton opened her embassy, with many lamentations that she had not been sooner made acquainted with Mrs. Ashby's rank in life, and as many hopes that they should be very intimate in future; concluding with entreating that she and my Lord Marquis would drink a cup of tea with her and Mr. Burton, previous to the

the ball, to which she hoped they both meant to go.

Mrs. Ashby assured her she had never had any such intention, and she had so long given up visiting, she must also decline accepting her polite invitation; her son, she understood, was engaged to accompany Lord Stanmore.

While she was speaking, Ferdinand, who had been above stairs dressing, joined the party, not knowing there was any body in the parlour. Could he have made his retreat unperceived, he certainly would have done so, as he suspected curiosity alone had brought this *bevy of beauties*; who all started from their seats the moment he entered, and began to curtsy with all due profundity.

Having resolved to appear as the Representative of his Monarch, he was very elegantly dressed, and wore round his neck,

pendant to a broad red ribbon, the order of the golden fleece in jewels, while the star of that of Alcantara, also in diamonds, glittered upon the left side of his coat: the blue ribbon of the latter order, which is worn as a sash, was confined upon his shoulder by a magnificent epaulette also in brilliants, and terminated in a large bow, from which depended the cross of a third order of Knighthood—namely, that of St. Jago.

Mrs. Burton was absolutely dazzled, as were also her friends; but Mrs. Hesham, like the Milfords, merely felt her spleen increase against this favourite of Fortune, whom she was resolved to mortify, let what would be the consequence of her giving way to the bent of her disposition; and, at all events, she was well assured that she should be paying court to the Milfords. With her wonted assurance she therefore exclaimed—

" Mercy upon me, man, you make my eyes water with your finery! In the name of Heaven, are all those glittering baubles diamonds, or merely French paste?"

" The latter, my dear Madam," was the reply.—" Do not you think that nation has brought their manufacture of false stones to great perfection?"

Nothing provoked the old woman more than being retorted upon in her own strain; and whenever that proved the case, even her best friends did not escape her lash. From Ferdinand she was sensible she had nothing to expect; she therefore continued bent upon humbling him. Giving him joy, with a malignant sneer upon his having been able to make such a choice collection, she proceeded—

" Well, it is a true, though a very old saying, that fine feathers make fine birds; but

but I am afraid, Mr. Ashby—my Lord, I meant to have said—that very few of the company who will be at the ball, will have forgot your running up and down these streets, with your rags streaming in the air."

"For shame, Mrs. Hesham!" screamed Mrs. Burton.

"Oh, fie!" re-echoed the other ladies, while the Mayoress declared she blushed for her; giving her a look, meant to express the serious displeasure she felt, at her having thus grossly departed from the principles his Worship had laid down for her.

But our hero, being really amused by her impotent endeavours to provoke him, laughed so heartily at her last remark, some very ridiculous recollections happening to come across him, that she found her sting had this time lost its venom, or rather that it had recoiled

upon herself; but hoping still to spoil his mirth, she cried—

"Bless me, ladies, I have not spoken treason, nor told an untruth! I appeal to Mrs. Ashby, if what I have said, was not Gospel. I am sure I never saw her son but barefooted till he was entered at the grammar-school; and it seems but yesterday, my Lord Marquis, since you, your mother, and bonny Kate, lived in the little hut, at the back of the rope-walk, by the side of a stinking ditch, where you used to make fishing-nets, you and Kate: however your Lordship seems to have caught the fish at last. But of evenings, at the time I mention, you used to write letters for the sailors' wives.—Don't you remember my coming in once, while you were so employed; and I must say you made very good use of your pen—nay, I believe you picked up a pretty many pence, among all your trades,

running

running of errands, and one thing and t'other, particularly after (thanks to Mr. Milford!) you obtained a little learning; however, what is past, is past:—I do not mean to reproach you with what you could not help.—God knows whose fault it was, you were so reduced! But I shall always think you were to blame, not to let your mother know sooner, how much you had risen in the world; for I am sure no one rejoices more than myself at her good fortune: for God knows, my heart has often bled for her, when I have seen her washing her miserable dungeon of a house, with a rag mop, and a broken pan!'

"Why, look ye, Mrs. Hesham," cried Catherine, who felt herself infinitely more offended than either Mrs. Ashby or our hero,"—(indeed the latter was very much diverted by her *kind* recapitulations, and the angry gestures of her companions)—" as for the rag mop and the

the broken pan, I don't deny you may have seen me use such things; but I defy you to say you ever saw my dear mother, as she still permits me to call her, making use of either;—no, no, I knew my duty rather better than that came to; and as for your pity—God help you!—many's the time and often that I remember having threatened to twirl my mop in your face, when you used to come taunting her as you do now. But you have not so much spirit in your whole body, as she has in her little finger, else you would not run about telling tales, and inventing falsities, to get a meal of victuals, which you are too lazy to earn as we did, at the time you mention."

Wildham enjoyed Catherine's display of spirit; but Mrs. Ashby, wishing to soften her asperity, rejoined—

"Mrs. Hesham certainly did not do you

you justice, my dear girl, though I am ·onvinced she did not mean to reproach ou, as at that period we all endea- oured to support each other; and ɿough you no longer make fishing ıets, you continue to pursue your ld trade of writing letters, Ferdinand, hough possibly upon different subjects rom those that then employed your pen. However, I hope adversity has taught us ıll the true use of riches; and though you, my son, '*have felt the giddy whirl of Fate,*' Mrs. Hesham is determined not o disgust you '*with the servile flatteries which enchant the great.*"

"Upon my honour, I give her credit for her plain speaking," replied Ferdinand, who, finding one of his brilliant buckles pinch his foot, stooped down to try to ease it, when, either owing to his pulling the strap too tight, or to the leather being rotten, he tore it nearly off.—"Like all lazy people, I have made bad worse. Had I gone patiently

to work, I should not have met with this misfortune; consequently, I should have been saved the trouble of changing my shoes."

"That is more than you could always have done," rejoined Mrs. Hesham.

"I beg your pardon, good lady; for whenever I was master of a pair of shoes, and I never recollect having been absolutely reduced to the level of the mendicant Friars, I made it a rule, out of a motive of economy, to change them every day, straps or no straps; and believe me I do not consider buckles as a luxury—nay, I am convinced my shoes set easier when tied with a leather thong, or a piece of packthread, whichever I could procure *gratis*."

Wildham gloried in the old woman's visible disappointment at not finding it possible to ruffle our hero's temper, while the never ceremonious Catherine asked him whether she should call Gonsalvo.

"You

"You forget, my dear girl, that we are not alone."

Mrs. Burton vowed she would be gone that moment if he made any ceremony, declaring she had suffered enough already; but could she have foreseen the consequences of her visit, his Lordship should not have been treated in the manner he had been, by an acquaintance of her's, and in her presence.

This *polite* apology was made with due gravity. Ferdinand, in return, assured her that he wished every body to enjoy freedom of speech in his presence; ladies were, besides, privileged people in every country. But to convince Mrs. Burton that he did not wish to treat her ceremoniously, he suffered Catherine to summon his valet, who soon made his appearance with another pair of shoes; and instantly falling on one knee, adjusted

them to his master's feet, and buckled them with the most critical exactness.

Mrs. Hesham's muscles were at work the whole time he was so employed; and, notwithstanding the pointed reprimand she had so recently received from Mrs. Mayoress, she hardly allowed the valet to close the door after him, ere she exclaimed—

"Well, if any body had told me they had seen what I have just witnessed, I should not have believed them."

"What do you mean, Mrs. Hesham?" asked Mrs Burton, with a look meant to awe her into silence; but, in for a penny, in for a pound, the old gossip thought, while she repeated, in an ironical tone—

"What do I mean, Madam?—Why, that I never was so astonished in all my life, as to see *Nandy Ashby* served upon one knee, and his shoes buckled for him!"

"I must own it was being abominably lazy," replied our hero; "but I cannot repine at having given way to my natural indolence, since the circumstance will afford you, Madam, such an inexhaustible theme of conversation."

"I must be gone!" cried Mrs. Burton, rising from her chair, in evident trepidation, as she began to fear her intended politeness would be totally misconstrued, owing to her having brought this prating old woman with her.

Her friends also rose, and were expressing their regret at Mrs. Ashby's positive, though polite refusal, to join their party, not forgetting to lament Ferdinand's pre-engagement, when the Marquis of Stanmore was announced, and shewn into the parlour. The ladies therefore stood suspended, hardly knowing whether they ought to go or stay; but Mrs. Hesham was next the door, and was by no means inclined to move, even disregarding Mrs. Burton's

 frowns,

frowns, so curious was she to hear what this great man had to say to Ferdinand.

He first approached Mrs. Ashby, to whom he paid his respects in the politest manner; then turning to our hero, said—

"I am very happy, Marquis, to find you armed at all points for conquest, as I am come in the name of a large party, to request you would favour us with your company to tea. You have certainly not forgot Mr. Fenwick; therefore I need not tell you that a better man, nor a greater oddity, does not exist. We are near neighbours in the country; and the more I see and know of him, the more I find to admire in him. He very seldom visits ——, though he is owner of one of the best houses in this town; but he came hither last night on purpose to accommodate Sir Henry Deloraine, myself, and my

my two nieces, the eldest of whom is one of his particular favourites; and she deems it no small honour to be distinguished by so good a man, who has a method of conferring obligations peculiar to himself."

"I perfectly recollect him," replied Ferdinand, "and have already made particular enquiries respecting him, as he was among those I always esteemed, and to whom, as a boy, I involuntarily pulled off my hat. Such is the ascendancy of goodness even upon children's minds!"

"Kindred minds are said to admire each other intuitively," rejoined the Marquis, "as Mr. Fenwick's recollections of your Excellency are not less flattering:—he is consequently very anxious to see you; and I have almost pledged my word that you will not disappoint his expectations. Had time been allowed, he would have invited you in form; but I know you are so superior to punctilio, that I assured him so trifling an

omission of etiquette would not prevent you from favouring him with your company; besides, you will positively greatly mortify my nieces and several other very handsome ladies, who participate in the general wish to see the Marquis Almaviva. I therefore hope those present will excuse my running away with you, as they have already had the advantage, from which those to whom I allude, have been excluded."

"There needs no apologies, my Lord Marquis," said Mrs. Hesham; "we are all going: and if we were not, I am sure the young gentleman will be much better amused in the company of Lady Ossulston and Miss Deloraine, than in remaining with us old-fashioned folks."

"I intended to have occasioned his Excellency what I flattered myself would prove an agreeable surprise; so forbore mentioning Lady Ossulston's name," rejoined Lord Stanmore.

"Mrs.

"Mrs. Hesham has not defeated your Lordship's kind intentions; for, except guessing that that lady is your niece, I know no more about her, than I did when I arrived at ——."

"Then to induce you to accompany me to Fenwick's, I must inform you that she is the envy of all the belles, and the admiration of all the young and fashionable men, not only in these environs, but even when she appears at St. James's, where she very much regrets not having been when you were presented."

"Her Ladyship is very rich," interrupted Mrs. Hesham.

"So are many of her admirers, my good Madam; so do not fancy she is indebted merely to her fortune for her celebrity."

"Her Ladyship is a most charming woman!" obtruded Mrs. Burton, anxious to pay her court to the Lord Lieutenant.

"I am happy to find one of her own sex so ready to do her justice," replied the

the Marquis, bowing to the gratified Mrs. Burton. "I know but of one failing in her composition—she is rather too independent in her notions; indeed she has made herself some enemies by speaking her mind too freely in mixed companies."

"That is what I particularly admire in her Ladyship," interrupted Mrs. Hesham. "Give me a person that has spirit enough to speak as they think at all times; and I commend her for having freely told Colonel Milford why she refused the offer of his hand."

"Did you learn what passed upon that occasion from that gentleman, Mrs. Hesham?" asked the Marquis; "or have you conjectured what my niece said?—as I know she never mentioned the particulars of the conversation you allude to, to any one. But you possibly guess she was too flippant, as Colonel Milford now compares her to Shakespeare's Beatrice."

"No

"No matter how I came by my intelligence, my Lord, since I know I am in the right. I agree, the lady is rather difficult; but who can blame her?—as, to my certain knowledge, Colonel Milford is not the only one by many that I could, if I chose, mention, who would have liked to have undertaken the task of humbling her gay spirit. But young widows are not so easily duped as silly forward girls; though, to be sure, her Ladyship's could hardly be called a marriage."

Mrs. Burton's "Oh fie, Mrs. Hesham!" was repeated with increasing vehemence by her companions.

The Marquis laughed; but, perceiving their absurdity had excited Ferdinand's curiosity, he turned to him.

"Mrs. Hesham appears so anxious to make your Excellency acquainted with every thing that concerns my niece, that I think it necessary to explain her allusion.

"About

"About five years ago, Eudora, then scarcely eighteen, gave her hand to Sir Charles Ossulston, who, I dare say, would have made her an excellent husband; but he was unfortunately taken ill during dinner on his wedding-day, and was obliged to be supported to his bed, from which he never rose again, but died on the third day, leaving my niece one of the richest widows in Great Britain; because her own fortune being very large, her jointure was in proportion, to which Sir Charles added every thing he possessed, that was at his own disposal. But some unpleasant family disputes arising, notwithstanding they were soon amicably settled, she has frequently declared she will never marry again; though I never heard her make any rash vows. But I know I am now exercising her patience; so shall I request your Excellency to order your carriage? I have dismissed my own."

Ferdinand

Ferdinand did as he desired, which was the signal for the departure of the lady visitors, whom our hero saw to their coach, as a small return for their intended politeness; thus rendering, by his well-timed condescension the Mayoress and two of her companions his fast friends; while the *sang-froid*, with which he had listened to Mrs. Hesham's malicious insinuations, had made her more than ever his enemy. So true it is, no man ever rises to such a height as to become conspicuous, but he is on one side censured by undiscerning malice, and idolized, on the other, by ignorant admiration; therefore though the first set reproach him for his best actions, and slander his apparent and incontestable excellencies, the others, by way of making him amends, exalt even his faults and follies into virtues.

The party that gave rise to this obser-
vation

vation had, however, no sooner driven from Wildham's door, than Mrs. Burton began to express her astonishment at Mrs. Hesham's recent behaviour, which she declared was inexcusable, considering the cautions she had received, vowing she would never take her any where again, since she had put her in such a tremor, that she should not be herself again the whole evening; and she would not have Mr. Burton made acquainted with the disrespect with which she had treated his orders, for the world; as the least she would have to expect, would be, being shewn the door, the moment he was made acquainted with her recent behaviour, which was both scandalous and abominable: again reproaching her with having effectually prevented her from enjoying any pleasure that evening.

Mrs. Hesham affected to be astonished at her dear friend's seeing the matterin so

serious a light. Had she (Mrs. Burton) lived more in the company of the great, she would not have thought her at all to blame—nay, she must have seen that Lord Stanmore approved of what she had said in his presence. People of any family were always allowed to speak their mind; and she thought it no small proof of young Ashby's noble extraction, his having taken every thing she had said, in such good part: though she defied any body to say she had spoken a word that was not strictly true. In short, she managed matters so dexterously, that, by the time they reached the Mayor's, she had convinced Mrs. Burton she was not near so much to blame; and what had passed during their stay at Wildham's, with a very accurate description of Ferdinand's dress, &c. &c. afforded them ample conversation during their tea, and made them hasten to the ball, to get a glimpse of this smart stranger.

CHAP.

MAHARAJA SERFOGI'S SARA

CHAP. X.

MR. FENWICK, whom our hero was going to visit, was the only son of a merchant, who had retired from business a few years before he died, merely to oblige his son; who frequently told him he was already too rich, and that he was by no means ambitious of astonishing the inhabitants of —— by his extravagance. Indeed few men were more free from the pride of wealth, or less ostentatious in their display of their riches, than this gentleman,

gentleman, whose sole delight centered in doing all the good in his power—not wishing to be reverenced, but to be loved by his poor neighbours.

Being exceedingly fond of a country life, he spent the chief of his time at his seat in the vicinity of Stanmore Priory. The surrounding estate brought him in seven thousand a-year; and as he kept some land in his own hands, it afforded him an opportunity of giving his tenants some useful hints respecting agriculture. His house at —— he retained, because it had belonged to his father, and because it afforded a comfortable asylum to the domestics grown grey in the latter's service, who preferred living among their old friends and relations, to settling near him in the country.—Once or twice a year he spent a week or ten days at——, purely for the accommodation of those

of

of his friends, who must otherwise have gone to an inn.

An early disappointment in love had induced him to remain a bachelor, and perhaps rather given his character a shade of misanthropy. Lady Ossulston's misfortune, and the frankness inherent in her nature, had rendered her deservedly dear to him; and chiefly to accommodate her and Miss Deloraine, who spent great part of her time with her cousin, he had now come to ——, where all his former friends were anxious to shew him every mark of respect.

Our hero had not escaped his notice during his childhood; but as he considered him to be under the immediate protection of Milford, whom he had long held in the most sovereign contempt—it being to that great man that he attributed the failure of his matrimonial prospects—

prospects. He had never given his supposed *protégé* any proofs of his regard.

Wildham had been alike unfortunate in the avowed protection of the pompous Merchant; but, nevertheless, stood very high in Fenwick's esteem, and had several times received presents of sufficient value, to induce him to trace them to their source, when he constantly discovered that they proceeded from the benevolence of Mr. Fenwick.

From Lord Stanmore he had learned the return of Ferdinand, with every *et cætera*; and to oblige Lady Ossulston, he had requested that Nobleman would engage him to drink his tea with them; acknowledging that he should like to see (though doubtless the novelty was worn off) how he bore the extraordinary alteration his prospects in life appeared to have undergone; as he neither did, nor affected to entertain any of those doubts which

still lurked in the breasts of the Milfords; though he thought that few men were rendered better by affluence or exaltation: averring that when the powers of the mind are unbound, and expanded by the sunshine of felicity, they more frequently luxuriate into follies, than blossom into goodness.

"Witness," he would say, "Colonel Milford, who might have been a pleasant, amiable man, had he been obliged to pursue any profession for a livelihood; but who was now insupportable, merely because he fancied himself a superior being."

Nevertheless, as no man was more ready to make allowances for the frailties of human nature, and as he rather pitied than absolutely blamed him, and as there was, besides, a rumour in circulation of his being a favoured lover of Miss Deloraine, he had invited him to join their party, which he had not done many minutes,

minutes, before his Excellency the Spanish Ambassador, and the Marquis of Stanmore, were announced.—Lady Ossulston only knew that the former was expected; therefore did not participate in the general, and to the Colonel, unpleasant surprise, his entrance occasioned.

The first glance the master of the house took of our hero, pleased him so much, that, before he allowed the Marquis to introduce him, he seized his hand, welcoming him, in the most flattering terms, to his native place, and more particularly to his house. Indeed we must acknowledge that Ferdinand, to a person framed to excite general admiration, added a sort of occult power of stealing upon the affection of minds congenial to his own, and of disposing their hearts to fondness and friendship, which was very far from being the case with Colonel Milford;—indeed it is a felicity granted only

to the favourites of Nature: and he soon convinced Fenwick that

" With such unshaken temper of the soul
" He bore the swelling tide of prosp'rous Fortune,
" That he deserv'd that fortune."

The usual introduction having been gone through, Lord Stanmore led Ferdinand to Lady Ossulston, who scarcely suffered him to say—" His Excellency," ere she exclaimed—

" My dear uncle, his Excellency and I are old acquaintance, and I am really very happy to meet him again in this world; for we were very near taking our departure together, to the one we are assured is so much better."

Our hero had not been near so quick-sighted as her Ladyship, and even now had some difficulty to credit the evidence of

of his eyes and ears, while he exclaimed, in an animated tone—

"Is it possible?"

"Both possible and true, Marquis!—so pray, uncle, introduce me to a gentleman, to whom I am under the greatest obligations."

"Nay, since you are already acquainted with his Excellency, it would be needless.—But pray where did you ever meet him before?—The gallantry of his nation perfectly accounts for his having obliged you."

"I will explain every thing by-and-by, uncle:—it is a tribute due to my brave deliverer."

Ferdinand was therefore introduced to every one present, and then, by Mr. Fenwick's desire, seated himself next Lady Ossulston, to whom her uncle applied for her promised explanation, as he already felt, he said, he participated

in the obligation his Excellency had laid her under.

Miss Deloraine's smiles were a convincing proof that she was in the secret, while her Ladyship thus began.

"Since I must confess my folly, you must know, uncle, that I was very near going to sea yesterday, in a very unpleasant manner; indeed you have so often prognosticated that I should come to an untimely end, that hitherto I have positively been afraid to tell you how very near I was making you a true prophet; but, thanks to the Marquis Almaviva, I escaped with the fright, since, at the imminent risk of his own life, he saved mine."

"Positively I will not suffer your Ladyship thus to exaggerate the very trifling service I was fortunate enough to render you;" relating in a very few words what had befallen her, declaring he had experienced

experienced no difficulty, nor did he conceive he had run any risk, in rescuing her Ladyship from her impending danger, which would have been comparatively trifling, had she been fortunate enough to have disengaged her foot from the stirrup."

"Then give me leave to tell you, Marquis," rejoined Mr. Fenwick, "that, however light you may make of your exertions, I believe there are not three men in —— who would have exposed themselves to the same danger, had they been fully aware of it, as you doubtless were, the tide being so rapidly coming in; and I am well convinced that it required all your strength, and no small share of address, even by your own modest account, to render your humane exertions of any service:—therefore, believe me, merely as the friend of this very imprudent young lady, I feel myself greatly indebted to you; since you alone,

I positively believe, could have saved her life."

Lord Stanmore was still more profuse of his very sincere thanks, seriously requesting his favourite niece, in which he was warmly seconded by their host, never again so wantonly, or, at all events, so unnecessarily, to endanger her life, rejoicing that she seemed so conscious of having almost miraculously escaped destruction.

She assured them she would never take the short cut in future.

"But it should appear," she continued, "that his Excellency would have consigned the adventure to oblivion, if, as a small return for the very serious risk he ran of accompanying me in my visit to Madam Amphitrite, I had not chosen thus publicly to acknowledge the favour he so kindly did me; though you have

have no idea, uncle, notwithstanding all Mr. Fenwick said, of the absolute extent of my danger;" upon which she now dwelt very forcibly, minutely describing every thing that had passed, and thus continuing—

"I rather expected to have met my brave knight-errant at the ball, and his commanding stature led me to hope I should recognise him; though I did not tell him whom he had so greatly obliged, to prevent my folly from becoming more public than needs must. Still I was very much surprised, upon reaching Mr. Fenwick's, to find my hair-breadth escape had not got wind—a proof that I was not known to my brave preserver, I conceived, and that he was discretion personified, and had greatly underrated the almost heroic action he had performed."

"Your Ladyship is bent upon rendering me vain," gaily replied Ferdinand;

 "though

"though it might be supposed that fright had deprived me of my faculties; for I protest that I could hardly persuade myself you were the lady I had met yesterday."

"Why, it would have been rather wonderful if you had, Marquis, for I was one patch of mud, from head to toe.— But pray how did you account for your wet appearance, without divulging my folly?"

"I informed one lady, upon whom I accidentally stumbled in my way home, that I had been taking a cold bath, which was certainly not deviating from the truth, though I fancy I did not absolutely satisfy Mrs. Hesham.— To my mother I was more communicative; but as neither she nor Mr. Wildham was acquainted with your Ladyship, I remained in ignorance of your having had a right to my best services, to which any relation of Lord Stanmore must be ever entitled."

 "There-

"Therefore you see, uncle, while the Marquis remains at ——, I may continue to brave even quicksands; but you must know that I enjoined secrecy to my groom: and having entered by a private door, I should not have let any one have known what had befallen me, if I had not stumbled upon my cousin here, who was impertinent enough to declare that I richly deserved my misfortune, and to read me a long lecture intended to preserve me from future danger. I acknowledge she had reason on her side; and I do believe this roll in those agreeable moving sands, has done me more good than all the excellent advice which has hitherto been thrown away upon me."

"Then I rejoice that your Ladyship has bought experience," said Fenwick.

Lord Stanmore agreed it might prevent her from ever being so rash again, while every one else congratulated her upon

her miraculous escape, and expressed their sense of our hero's humanity, and spirit of gallantry.

Colonel Milford (between whom and Ferdinand a mere silent bow had hitherto passed) was the only one who remained silent; indeed, had this *little great man* known whom he was to meet, he would have framed some excuse not to have joined the party, as he never felt himself more awkwardly situated. Lady Ossulston he had most cordially hated from the moment she refused his hand; and the *ragamuffin* who, but for his father's mistaken bounty, would now most probably have been only a common sailor on board one of his ships, was become equally the object of his aversion;—to see, therefore, such a contemptible being decorated with several orders of Knighthood, and blazing in jewels, was a mortification he was by no means prepared to endure: for of what use were his father's

father's boasted riches, since they could not give him birth, nor precedence of Ferdinand Ashby.

So far from rejoicing at their joint escape, he sincerely wished he had been suffocated in the quicksand, with her he had so officiously disengaged from her perilous situation. Of course, to have expressed any thing like satisfaction upon the occasion, would have been utterly impossible. Besides, he seldom saw Miss Deloraine but in Lady Ossulston's presence; and he could not help fancying, not absolutely without reason, that the latter lady rejoiced in the idea of having humbled his vanity; therefore rather feared her holding him up as an object of ridicule to her cousin:—but of this she was incapable.

Nor did he much care whether he succeeded or not, in this his second attempt, since he had missed the chance

of

of becoming Lord Stanmore's heir, which would have been the case, could he have induced the young widow to listen to his suit. However, as her cousin was considered the next best match in the county, why, if he did chuse a wife so near home, he must have her: because even to prevent any other man from carrying off such a prize, was a matter of moment to this disciple of Mars, who bore infinite resemblance, in point of disposition, to the dog in the manger.

To pique Lady Ossulston had long been his aim; so while the company were congratulating and rejoicing with her, he was endeavouring to divert Miss Deloraine's attention to a very different subject; but totally failed in the attempt, as she warmly entered into the spirit of the party assembled, gaily relating how much she and her cousin had been puzzled to guess who it was had so opportunely

tunely come to the assistance of the latter; observing that though they had heard of the Marquis Almaviva being at ——, the real truth had never entered their heads. The Colonel would have wondered if it had!

The sarcastic look which accompanied this speech, was not lost upon Lady Ossulston, who instantly rejoined—

"For my own part, I persisted in affirming that it was one of Homer's heroes come to life again, for the express purpose of saving mine; or that Hercules, *in propria persona,* had left his celestial abode for that purpose; having never seen any gentleman in ——, or these environs, to whom my unknown champion bore any resemblance: none of them ever having conveyed the idea of a demigod to my imagination."

An

An affected laugh was all the reply the Colonel deigned to make; while our hero neither affected to disregard, nor particularly to notice him, treating him in every respect like a total stranger, and by no means appearing to understand what both Lord Stanmore and Mr. Fenwick deemed very impertinent allusions;—in proportion, therefore, as Ferdinand rose in their joint esteem, the Colonel lowered himself in their opinion.

Tea being over, Lord Stanmore advised their adjourning to the ball, as there would be no dancing till they had made their *entrée*. Lady Ossulston, who had entered into a very lively conversation with Ferdinand respecting Spanish customs and manners, was not in such haste;—her uncle was therefore obliged to remind her that it grew late, and the carriages were in waiting: this induced her and the other ladies to leave the room, in search of their cloaks.

During

During their absence, the Marquis drew our hero to one of the windows, to enquire his opinion of his gay niece.

Ferdinand spoke of her, as he thought, very favourably.

" Do you mean to dance?" asked the gratified Peer.

" I am very fond of the exercise, Marquis; but you know how strangely I am situated, and to you I can acknowledge that I am fearful my private feelings may lead me to be guilty of some rash action derogatory to my public character."

" I perfectly understand your feelings; but I think you can have no need to fear any disputes about precedence; at all events, it shall be my care to prevent your meeting with any insult. Colonel Milford, though I deem him an arrogant coxcomb, is no fool; and as for his courage, why I do not think, as

Lady

Lady Ossulston once said, it ever rises higher than to ape a snarl."

"It was never better defined," rejoined Ferdinand; "therefore will you request her Ladyship would favour me with her hand for the evening:—our acquaintance has been of too short a date, to allow me to prefer my petition myself."

"Then I will do the honours of your modesty."

The ladies returning while he was speaking, he made Lady Ossulston a sign to draw near. She obeyed the summons.

"My dear Eudora, suffer me to recommend this very *modest* young gentleman to your notice, as he aspires to the honour of your hand this evening, but was at a loss how to word so presumptuous a request."

"Then

"Then, by way of punishing him for his affected diffidence, I accept him for my partner."

Ferdinand's reply breathed the national gallantry of a Castilian, and made her Ladyship declare she found the Spanish cavaliers even rivalled their neighbours, the French, in the glorious art of making fools of women.

"But will your national indolence, your Excellency, suffer you to enjoy dancing country-dances?—as I am particularly partial to them, and have absolutely tired down every beau in these environs. There is a gentleman now in the room, who kept his bed for a week, in consequence of having danced with me at one assembly."

Since her Ladyship had joined her uncle and Ferdinand, the conversation had been carried on sufficiently loud for every

every one present to overhear what passed; and her Ladyship, turning round, cried—

"Is not what I say, fact, Colonel Milford?—Did not I endanger your life?"

"I make it a rule never to contradict Lady Ossulston, even in self-defence," was the gallant reply; though he with difficulty concealed his increasing vexation.

"Then your Excellency may take it for granted, I spoke the truth," said her Ladyship; "but let us be going, for I perceive these elderly gentlemen are impatient to display their graces.—Fanny Deloraine, come under my wing, child, as I officiate as your *chaperon.*"

Mr. Fenwick, as master of the house, handed her Ladyship to her carriage. The Colonel escorted her companion, endeavouring

endeavouring to conceal his ill humour under an unusual semblance of gaiety. Lord Stanmore accompanied our hero, to whom, in answer to a polite speech respecting Lady Ossulston, he spoke highly in her favour, acknowledging that many people thought she possessed too great a share of spirits :—Colonel Milford for one, since she had refused to bear his name, thought her both masculine and coquettish.—In short, he seems to wish to doom her to celibacy for having dared to reject his hand; but those who know how she spends her time, and how well her house is regulated upon the most simple, elegant plan, and how sincerely she delights in doing good among her poor neighbours, can neither refuse her their esteem, nor withhold their admiration of her conduct, which has ever been framed upon the strictest rule of right. For my own part, I do not scruple to say I am proud of my niece, and that

I highly

I highly approve of her rejection of young Milford, who is, as I believe I said before, in my opinion, an upstart, arrogant coxcomb; but his father has such sway in this town, that his absurdities are the less to be wondered at; and there are times and seasons, considering our form of government, when it is both policy and wisdom, even for us patricians, to treat such people, whatever may be our private opinion of them, as our equals."

Ferdinand spoke highly in praise of the mercantile part of the community, bestowing some very just encomiums upon Milford, as a man of business. The Colonel, he agreed, was not among his favourites, since, of all degrees of arrogance, he thought that arising from mere riches, rendered men the most insupportable. He did not chuse to appear curious, or he would have enquired whether he

he was likely to succeed with Miss Deloraine. The Marquis anticipated his question, by hinting that he believed Fanny hardly knew her own mind at present.

The stopping of the carriage broke in upon the conversation.

The ball room, and those adjoining, were crowded even beyond the general expectation; as the idea of seeing an Extraordinary Ambassador, and whom many of them recollected running about ——, literally as Mrs. Hesham had described him, had induced every soul who could procure a ticket, to increase the crowd. The moment, therefore, Ferdinand entered, he was surrounded by all those who merely thought of gratifying their curiosity, by staring him in the face.

In return for their politeness, he addressed every one he recollected, with so much

much affability, that the gentlemen nearly all agreed in pronouncing him a d——d fine looking fellow, and truly deserving his good fortune; while the ladies expressed their approbation of his person and dress in audible whispers. We except a few of Mr. Milford's friends, who, out of compliment to him, still presumed he would prove an impostor.

Mortified, as it may be supposed the Colonel felt, he did not, as Lord Stanmore had foreseen, offer to dispute our hero's right to begin the dance with his fair partner; indeed, he had solaced himself with the idea of seeing him acquit himself very awkwardly.—To his infinite vexation, he was again disappointed; Ferdinand having made a great study, and a very great proficiency in the science of dancing, during his residence in South America. Indeed, had he not been conscious of excelling in that

fashionable

fashionable exercise, he would not have been so ready to display his graces upon the present occasion.

Mrs. Hesham was not among the least astonished to perceive he might almost have vied with the *Dieu de la danse*; though she took care to repeat the minutest circumstance respecting his childhood to every one present, who was less acquainted with his former poverty; and particularly to those likely to repeat what she said to the Milford family, observing that he had not always sported a pair of shoes, much less a pair of diamond buckles, so little was she influenced by Mr. Burton's serious cautions. Indeed it was next to impossible, even to herself, to put a curb upon her spiteful disposition, since she was by no means actuated by her regard for Colonel Milford or his family, in thus, as she hoped, lowering our hero; but it gratified her own pique,

and enabled her to vent her envious spleen against a man, whom she could not but consider as greatly her superior, and a woman (his mother) whom she had ever detested, because she had always felt that Mrs. Ashby despised her, and even during her greatest poverty, had appeared to look down upon her.

Therefore shoving herself into Mrs. Milford's circle, who encouraged her to proceed with her impertinent remarks by their looks, while they affected to condemn her illiberal loquacity, she took the hint, declaring, in a loud tone, that she would speak her mind; let who would pay their court to the *Spanish Grandee*, Margaret Hesham would never increase the number of his flatterers.

" Some of the foolish Misses will have it he dances well. I maintain he does not. He is too big—of course too heavy; and I say Colonel Milford cuts

a much

a much better figure in a ball.—And pray do his brilliant gewgaws increase his merit? They may be proofs of his rank, you will say; but who knows by what right he wears as many ribbons as there are colours in the rainbow?—However, fine feathers make fine birds; and I am sure that were one of Mr. Milford's porters to be equally well dressed, he would cut as good a figure."

Thus did the old woman display her envious disposition, to the no small amusement of some of her hearers; while the Mayor, little thinking how grossly she was deviating from his orders, was in another part of the room, courting some, and recommending to others to treat the illustrious stranger with all due marks of respect; expatiating very learnedly upon the great honour his Excellency the Marquis Almaviva did the town of ——, exhorting the citizens to be proud of so great a man having been born within their

 walls:

walls: thus falling into the exact opposite extreme of his friend Milford, who was tacitly encouraging Mrs. Hesham to insult the object of Mr. Burton's admiration, if not veneration.

Indeed it is said that distinction is so pleasing to the mind of man, that a great part of the pain and pleasure of life arises from the gratification or disappointment of an incessant wish for superiority. Colonel Milford, as well as his father, verified the truth of this remark, on this memorable evening; the former in particular, who, instead of being, as heretofore, the magnet of general attraction, found himself completely overlooked, in favour of our hero. Though some of the ladies present still gave him the preference, the Spanish Marquis was too brown to suit their taste; but by far the greatest number, and all those whose applause was worth coveting, declared their approbation of dark, bold, intrepid men.

Of

Of course the Colonel felt very little gratified by the few praises that did fall to his share; and, unfortunately, after the second dance, while the company were seated, for the purpose of taking some refreshments, he had the misfortune, in returning from one of the lower rooms, to slip down several stairs, by which accident he sprained his ankle so dreadfully, that he was obliged to be supported back into the ball-room, where he threw himself upon the first seat, declaring his utter inability to dance any more; explaining, not much more coherently than we have done, how he had thus disabled himself from resuming his station among the festive set.

Lady Ossulston only laughed at what she termed his awkwardness; nor was Miss Deloraine, to appearance, at all inclined to pity his sufferings. Indeed it was soon buzzed about the room, with what truth we will not pretend to say,

 that

that the accident was not likely to be attended with any dangerous consequences, since it was suspected he had purposely slid down, and then complained of a sprain that merely existed in his own imagination, to avoid standing up again among the dancers; and he confirmed these surmises by absolutely refusing either to have his ankle examined, or to make use of any of the various remedies for sprains, his friends recommended to his notice. The fact was, he could no longer bear to give the *pas* to Ferdinand, whose graceful dancing had deprived him of the triumph he had hitherto enjoyed—namely, that of excelling in that science.

Owing, however, to his thus having delivered himself up to the *green-eyed monster*, Miss Deloraine was also reduced to the disagreeable necessity of being a spectator; and as she had adopted the general opinion respecting the accident which

which had disabled her admirer, she was very much provoked to perceive that he had rendered her an object of general observation; as some of the company affected to sympathize in her mischance, while others, who envied her the Colonel's particular notice, visibly rejoiced in her mortification.

Lady Ossulston, who had not been for a moment Milford's dupe, only thought, as she was going down the next dance, how she could most add to his deserved and visible mortification, and at the same time revenge her cousin's wrongs; and, at last, conceived she could not do it more effectually than by requesting her partner to lead out Miss Deloraine.

The moment, therefore, they had done their duty, she preferred her petition in the most polite terms, carefully avoiding to give our hero her real reason for thus trespassing upon his complaisance. Her

countenance was not, however, so discreet, as Ferdinand perceived she wished to humble the arrogant coxcomb: and though he felt no wish to change his partner, he very politely acceded to her wishes; but not without expressing a sufficient degree of reluctance to resign her hand, to render his ready compliance the more flattering.

They in consequence approached Miss Deloraine; Lady Ossulston telling her she was not in a dancing humour, feeling more inclined to court the favour of the fickle goddess at cards.

"So do, dear girl, stand up with his Excellency for a couple of dances. He is very partial to the exercise, and requested me to entreat you would take my place; so do not think of remaining any longer a spectator, as you are certainly at liberty to make a second choice, since

since your partner is so completely disabled from renewing his claim."

Miss Deloraine, who had never felt herself more uncomfortably situated, readily agreed to her cousin's considerate proposal; thus completing the vexation of her *lame lover*, who certainly felt a very gnawing pain, if not in his ankle, penetrating his very vitals: indeed it was with difficulty he concealed his internal rage, as Miss Deloraine exerted herself a great deal more with our hero, than she had done while dancing with him, and appeared in much higher spirits.

Could any thing have been more provoking to a lover of any description?—and even Ferdinand, though perhaps gratified in some respects, could not help rather blaming the young lady for giving a man, she evidently cared so little about, any degree of encouragement.

At the conclusion of the two dances, Lady Ossulston and Mr. Fenwick walked up to them; the former told Ferdinand she came to ask his leave to go down the next dance with her old friend. But Miss Deloraine challenged their host herself; declaring, since her cousin did mean to resume her station among the dancers, she should also resume her partner, and thus it was at last settled: Lady Ossulston gaily observing that between them, she believed his Excellency would find it expedient to keep his bed at least for a day.

The evening therefore concluded far more to the satisfaction of the universally admired Spaniard, than to that of the crippled Colonel, who had more than once mentally vowed never to part with his liberty, in favour of such an unfeeling woman as Miss Deloraine had shewn herself, since she had merely once slightly enquired how he found himself, and who had

had laughed and chatted away with both her partners, as if no such person as himself had ever existed; she might therefore for her pains set her cap at Ashby's son, or at old Fenwick:—when he recollected that his wishes would neither deprive the first of his consequence, nor the second of his money, and that he should be generally laughed at, were he to suffer either of them to carry off such a prize. Lady Ossulston, he was well convinced, would never marry a foreigner, and it behoved him to prevent Miss Deloraine from acting so imprudently. This reflection, disabled as he affected to be, induced him to insist upon seeing her to her carriage; notwithstanding she feared he stood much the most in need of support. But, taught wisdom by experience, he averred that, while employed in her service, he could set even torture at defiance.

Such a gallant declaration silenced all her scruples; they therefore followed Ferdinand and Lady Ossulston to the outward door. Her Ladyship's carriage was of course called; but in his haste to obey the summons, her coachman locked one of the wheels with that of another carriage, which not only impeded his own progress, but that of several others. Our hero's chariot not being among the number, he ordered it up, requesting her Ladyship would do him the honour to make use of it; it could return for him.

"By no means; as I shall only accept your considerate offer, upon condition that you occupy the middle seat," was the answer.

Ferdinand was too much flattered by the proposal, to start any objections; so handing her in, he retreated to make way for Miss Deloraine, to whom the Colonel

Colonel had a thousand things to say after she was seated in the carriage, purposely to keep the object of his aversion in waiting, till Lady Ossulston cried—

"A truce to your ill-timed gallantry, Colonel! You must be sensible you are detaining the Marquis Almaviva."

Forgetting his terrible sprain, the warrior retreated with a degree of percipitancy, which completed her Ladyship's triumph; while Ferdinand, having taken his seat, ordered his coachman to Mr. Fenwick's, and away they drove.

CHAP. XI.

LADY Ossulston made no scruple of acknowledging, as soon as they were upon the move, her suspicions respecting the Colonel's accident; obliquely hinting, in the most flattering terms, to our hero, that she believed it originated in his having engrossed that attention Colonel Milford found it next to impossible to dispense with. However she hoped the little success his shallow artifice had met with, would prove of infinite service to him, and render him less presuming, adding—

"That

"That a man of very superior rank, or very superior accomplishments, should possess some degree of pride, may be very easily accounted for, and is certainly very excusable. But of what can Milford be proud?—Surely not of his extraction. Perhaps indeed of his figure."

"And I know he used to pride himself upon his superior style of dancing," said Miss Deloraine; "which, in addition to his red coat, and his father's riches, he fancied rendered him irresistible."

"Education you know, ladies, Pope says; makes the man," said our hero; "therefore Colonel Milford

"Struts a soldier, open, proud, and brave."

But, joking apart, I think what you both very justly condemn in his conduct, does not absolutely originate in himself. He has, from his infancy, been always flattered and obeyed by those about him;

he therefore expects, though he is undoubtedly often disappointed, the same abject submission and gross adulation from the world in general. But I positively attribute his overbearing arrogance, in a great measure, to the tame sufferance of the inhabitants of this town, and the servile complaisance of his father's friends."

"I believe you are perfectly right, Marquis," replied her Ladyship; "for instance, this very street—(they had just turned into it)—was unpaved to prevent the possibility of this martial hero's slumbers being disturbed. You are possibly not troubled with any of those delicate feelings which continually annoy Colonel Milford; therefore may, like me, be astonished at his suffering the complaisant Burghers of —— to render their streets nearly impassable upon his account."

Ferdinand was laughing at his companion's droll remarks respecting this said

said effeminate warrior, when the carriage suddenly stopped, and the horses began to snort and plunge, endeavouring at the same time to recede, instead of advance; and the coachman being unable to manage them, the hind wheels of the chariot were sent with violence against an adjacent house.

The ladies screamed, being very seriously alarmed. Ferdinand, hastily letting down the front glass, enquired what was the matter, desiring the coachman to sooth, instead of threaten, the ungovernable animals, addressing them himself in Spanish; observing, by way of dissipating the ladies' fears, that they did not understand English, assuring them that there was no necessity for alighting, as they requested, since the lane was too narrow to permit the carriage to be overturned, and they ran no other risk.

They

They agreed there was reason in what he said, and in a few seconds, owing to his judicious advice, the frightened animals became rather more composed, and the coachman at last, in answer to his master's repeated enquiries, told him he believed there was a house on fire, a little farther on, as there was a prodigious smoke, and he had seen something like flames at a window, when the horses began to plunge.

Ever alive to the feelings of humanity, Ferdinand cried out—" Open the door!" and jumped out, assuring the ladies he would not be gone a minute, and that the horses were now perfectly quiet, desiring the footman, nevertheless, to stand at their heads, adding—

" If there is any appearance of fire, it would be madness to attempt to urge them forward," running about forty or fifty yards up the lane, when he perceived a small

small house absolutely in flames, which had burst out at the back windows, and were, owing to a brisk breeze, and a great draught, raging with violence.

Not a soul, his own servants excepted, were to be seen. He therefore flew back again, and told the ladies it was but too true what the coachman had said—a house was certainly on fire, and he thought he had heard screams from withim: he therefore would not pay them so poor a compliment as to make any excuses for leaving them, to go to the assistance of the sufferers; hastily ordering the coachman to back the now trembling Andalusians, and desiring one of the footmen to attend the ladies, sending the other to rouse the neighbours to his assistance.

The moment Lady Ossulston was informed the lives of some of her fellow-creatures were in danger, she forgot her recent

recent fright, and earnestly requested the Marquis would pay no regard to them.

"Though for all our sakes," she cried, as he ran from her, "be careful of yourself!"

She then proposed walking home, as they were very near Mr. Fenwick's; but both the coachman and footman so confidently assured her that there was no danger, that she suffered them to back the carriage out of the lane, and to set her down at her friend's, from whence the footman ran back to his master's assistance;—the coachman promising to follow as soon as he had put up his horses.

By the time Ferdinand got back to the house, some of the neighbours were at their windows, calling to know what was the matter; and, in a few minutes, the alarm in that part of the town became general:

general: but not a soul was yet in the street when he reached the door, which he sent in with his foot, upon very plainly hearing screams from within, and rushed forward.

At the farther end of the room, into which the door opened, was the staircase leading to two smaller rooms above, and there he thought the fire had begun, as both steps and banisters were in one continued flame, which fortunately, however, as well as the smoke, ascended; and having found vent from the only window to the street, from whence the fire had first been discerned, he was able to remain in the room, and now very plainly heard the piercing shrieks of two females over head, who, having no retreat, must inevitably have perished, if Providence had not sent our hero to their assistance.

To ascend the stairs, was become impracticable; but as the house was very old

old and very low, and not ceiled, he discovered, notwithstanding he was half suffocated with smoke, a crevice, sufficiently large to put his hand through: his eyes having been directed to the spot by the screams of those above. Therefore, stepping upon a chair, he gave the mouldering board so violent a wrench, that, in a very few seconds, he was able to make the aperture sufficiently large to get the two women through, who proved to be the mother and daughter of a constable who was in attendance that evening; and having left a candle burning for him upon a small table, at the foot of the stairs, upon the banisters of which they had carelessly left some linen, they had had the misfortune, they supposed, to move some of it in going up to bed, which had occasioned the dreadful accident they had so much reason to deplore.

Their

Their gratitude was unbounded when they found themselves so very unexpectedly delivered from their perilous situation by the Marquis Almaviva, whom they instantly recognised, having seen him several times since his return to ——; so calling down blessings upon their preserver, and, in the same breath, rending the air with their screams, they flew into the street, all but naked, declaring they were ruined and undone; and all their neighbours, whose houses they were convinced would share the same fate, would be no less to be pitied. —And what might have been the consequence of their imprudence, we cannot pretend to say, had it not been for the timely assistance our hero gave them, and the presence of mind which he displayed upon the occasion.

The house where the fire broke out, he knew belonged to Mr. Milford; and the honest old man who occupied it, was an

assistant

assistant in his warehouses, which communicated with the back part of his habitation, in a direct line with the wind and flames; and while Ferdinand was employed in rescuing the poor women, the fire, having burst through the roof, had caught a thatched building belonging to the Merchant, and one of his storehouses.

Fourteen years' absence had not obliterated from his memory the exact situation of these premises, having, when a boy, frequently rambled over every part of them;—he therefore hastened to the most likely spot, to stop the progress of the flames, when, in endeavouring to scramble upon the burning building, he found he had not the free use of his arms, which made him, for the first time, recollect that he was dressed for an assembly.

At any other time he would have laughed

laughed very heartily at the grotesque figure which he now cut: however, hastily flinging off his coat, ribbon, the order he wore round his neck, &c. he threw them to his servant, whom he saw advancing, followed by one or two more, and sprang upon the burning roof, a few yards from where the flames were already raging, to the wonder and terror of every one present, and began tearing off the thatch, while the crowd, which now kept momentarily increasing, were incessantly calling to him "to take care, for God's sake to take care; for the building was very old, and the timbers must be rotten."

He, in return, commanded every one present to fetch water, and to hand it up to him; continuing his occupation, regardless of the danger, or of the repeated warnings from those below, till, as they had foreseen, he slipped through the rafters which he had cleared; but

 fortunately,

fortunately, and to his great astonishment, he fell upon a bed, in a sort of loft, immediately beneath the thatch, where two of Mr. Milford's porters were sound asleep, notwithstanding the noise he had made. But being now completely disturbed, they enquired, in a grumbling tone, what was the matter.

The fall having made Ferdinand sensible of his late imprudence and present danger, he soon roused them to a sense of their's; and the approaching flames allowing them no time for debate, they hurried down a ladder into the wareroom below, assisted in their descent by the light the flames afforded them, which scattered so plentiful a shower of sparks upon every thing within their reach. Our hero did not escape the annoyance, who, fearful his shirt sleeves might also blaze, seized one of the frousy rugs from off the bed, which had broken his fall, and flinging it round his shoulders,

shoulders, made the best of his way after the two men; but by the time he had once more reached the street in safety, he was as sick of his covering, as he had before been with the smoke; when, finding several people had now arrived with pails of water, he instantly, judging from his own sensations that it required ablution, plunged it into one; and to this circumstance, and the sudden thought which in consequence occurred to our hero, Mr. Milford was perhaps indebted for the preservation of his warehouses, and many people for their lives; since, having completely drenched the rug, ordering more water to be brought, he ascended a ladder, which his servants had raised where he directed, and extended the covering upon the thatch. Finding, as he expected, it rather checked the progress of the fire, he called loudly for more coverings, rugs, or blankets; insisting upon their being procured from the nearest houses, and promising to replace them with new.

The judicious bribe that he held forth, soon procured him a plentiful supply; indeed his own two footmen, without standing upon any ceremony, ran into the adjacent dwellings, and seized every thing likely to answer their purpose, by which means, in less than a quarter of an hour, the remaining thatch was totally covered; and, by degrees, they were able to smother the flames, where they had caught the rafters, as those who brought the water, were directed to keep pouring it upon the blankets.

In short, such was the indefatigable zeal of Ferdinand, and so judicious were his orders, that the small house already mentioned, was the only one that was burnt to the ground; though, had the flames been suffered to reach the end of the thatched building, nothing less than a miracle could have saved either Mr. Milford's warehouses, or Mr. Burton's timber-yards, which were in full as much danger, being immediately behind the house where the

the fire began, which was greatly abated when Mr. Milford arrived upon the spot, followed by a vast crowd, among the first of whom, it may be supposed, was his Worship the Mayor; and when he saw what a narrow escape his very extensive premises had had, he returned his thanks aloud, where they were certainly most due, declaring that, had the fire reached his large piles of timber, he should have been ruined and undone, as he was not insured for a single sixpence.

"Then your avarice would have been justly punished," said some one in th crowd.

"Mr. Milford was always insured," he said, "but not at the present time for more than one half of the value of the goods that were in his warehouses."

He was therefore, it must be acknowledged, in a most terrible fright, when he learned the first news of the fire, and

when he reached the spot where it had begun, notwithstanding the conflagration was trifling to what it had been, he was very liberal in his promises, to induce the people to exert themselves; but they laughed at his present fears, assuring him that, thanks to the Spanish Ambassador, who was still upon the roof of his storehouse, assisting to cut away the damaged timbers (that the fire might not break forth a second time) the danger was all over: relating how Ferdinand had saved the lives of four people; how near he had been losing his own, by falling through his rotten roof; not to mention his having preserved half the town, which, owing to the time of night, would certainly have been burnt to the ground, but for his courage, advice, and activity.

As our hero was by this time covered with wet and dirt, his hair dishevelled, and working as hard as any of those near him, the great man would not have

recognised

recognised him among the crowd, if he had not been pointed out to him, by the multitude; but we must confess that when he learned to whom he owed the preservation of his property, he felt completely ashamed of his late conduct towards the intrepid fellow, though he would much rather have laid under the same obligation to any other person. He nevertheless thought it necessary to say something expressive of his gratitude; as Ferdinand, having taken every necessary precaution to prevent any further accidents, jumped down, recommending their continuing to throw water in various places which he pointed out.

Mr. Milford, therefore, in an elaborate rather than a feeling speech, endeavoured to return him thanks, adding—

"All those buildings to the right are mine; my loss would consequently have been immense, but for your Lordship's

 timely

timely interference: therefore never did I feel myself more at a loss to express my gratitude."

Without noticing the great man's having thus acknowledged his right to the title he gave him, our hero replied—

"I still consider myself as greatly your debtor, Sir; for I cannot take any merit to myself for the trifling service chance has enabled me to render you, since I could not have reconciled it to my own conscience, to have acted otherwise than I have done; even admitting I had been totally unacquainted with the owner of the premises which I endeavoured to save: therefore, believe me, I feel amply repaid in my efforts having proved successful."

Mr. Burton scarcely suffered him to bring his speech to a conclusion, ere he overwhelmed him with thanks for having preserved

preserved his timber-yards, vowing "he would never run so great a risk again; for the very next day he would insure at least one half of his property:—it was very rare indeed that all was lost, and people only got paid for what was actually consumed."

Thus he publicly discovered his real disposition; he, however, concluded by wishing it was in his power to make his Lordship some amends, assuring him his will was not wanting.

"Aye, aye, go it!" cried a voice from among the crowd; "but remember that fair words butter no parsnips; and you would see us all d——d, before you would pay for one of the blankets which saved your timber-yards."

"While his Lordship," cried another "(God in heaven bless and preserve him!) has promised to pay for them all."

It is probable that these remarks would not have passed unnoticed by the Magistrate, but for the arrival of the Marquis of Stanmore and Mr. Fenwick, who, having heard of the fire before they left the ball-room, had hurried home, fearing the ladies would be alarmed; and they certainly found them in a state of very anxious suspense, as they were both fearful that our hero's intrepid spirit would induce him to endanger his own life, rather than see another perish.

Lady Ossulston had already dispatched all her male servants to his assistance; and neither the Marquis nor Mr. Fenwick allowed her time to express half her fears, their own prompting them to endeavour to prevent their young friend from becoming a sufferer, through his humane exertions. Perceiving, when they did arrive, the dripping situation he was in, without speaking, Mr. Fenwick threw a large driving-coat of his own, which he had

had purposely brought with him, over his shoulders; while the Marquis requested he would immediately go home, and to bed, as the only means of avoiding catching a severe cold.

Mr. Milford also spoke to the same effect; though if he had not been fearful of offending his son (who, in consequence of his sprain, as he said—though, in fact, because he had learned our hero "was first in the throng," had not chosen to increase the crowd) he would have asked him to have drank a tumbler of Madeira, as a sort of preventative against rheums.—The more thoughtful Burton proposed going forward, that Mrs. Ashby might not be alarmed by his Excellency's appearing unexpectedly before her, such a figure. Our hero thanked him, but preferred sending one of his own footmen, as least likely to surprise her.

Giving the man proper instructions,

and dispatching him immediately, he was then preparing to follow him, with Lord Stanmore and Mr. Fenwick, who were resolved to see him safe home, they said, when an honest, simple, blunt Jack Tar, the Captain of a vessel in Mr. Milford's employ, whose house was among those which would inevitably have been destroyed, had the fire been permitted to spread, pushed through the crowd, with a bottle and glass in his hand, crying—

"Make way! What signifies talking? Make way I say!"

When having reached our hero, he exclaimed—

"God in heaven bless and preserve your Honour! You were certainly sent here on purpose to preserve our lives and property.—I am sure you have saved me and mine from the parish; so may I entreat you would honour me so far as to drink

drink a glass of special good brandy, or I would not offer it you; for the heat you are in, and standing as you now do, in wet clothes, may make you rue the day when you exposed your life to save our's;" pouring out a bumper of the cordial specific, which he presented to Ferdinand.

"An excellent thought, Captain Munford," said he; "and I thankfully accept your prescription," drinking a part of what he had given him, and returning the remainder, saying—"May you never, my honest fellow, want a friend in need, nor a glass of such good brandy!"

The Marquis of Stanmore and Mr. Fenwick also thanked the worthy Captain for having anticipated their wishes; while the crowd, one and all, put up the most fervent prayers for our hero's future happiness, exultingly repeating to the Marquis, Fenwick, Milford, and the truly grateful

grateful Burton, the extraordinary—nay, heroic efforts of their now beloved townsman, as they styled Ferdinand; every one seeming to take pride to himself in recounting and dwelling upon the intrepidity and presence of mind which he had displayed:—and such will ever be the triumph of virtue; therefore Rowe justly says—

> "That to be good is to be happy.—Angels
> "Are happier than men, because they are better."

And truly might Ferdinand be said—

> "To enjoy everlasting peace of mind."

Having long found that—

> "The height of heaven is goodness."

Indeed he joined, to the strictest and noblest principles of honour and generosity, the tenderest sentiments of benevolence and compassion: though, being naturally warm, he could not even hear of an

an injustice or a baseness, without a sudden indignation; nor of the miseries or misfortunes of a fellow-creature, without melting into softness, and endeavouring to relieve them.

But to return to our tale.—Having drank his glass of brandy, he was once more preparing to depart, when Lord Stanmore remarked that he was without a hat.

" True," he replied; " I do not recollect having given it to my servant; so I suppose I lost it when I fell into that loft. 'Tis of no consequence; but should you, my friends," looking round him, " chance, in digging among the rubbish, to stumble upon the button and loop, I should be obliged to you to bring it to Mr. Wildham's."

Now this said button and loop, about which he was so indifferent, were of jewels, and

and of great value, which Mr. Fenwick told the surrounding multitude, who all swore every handful of rubbish should be sifted, but they would find it.

" Do so, my good folks," cried Burton, " and you shall be none the worse for it!"

" No, nor yet much the better for you," replied somebody, while Ferdinand and his two friends walked away; when the great Milford, who was very anxious to retrieve his consequence, declared he would give whoever found the button and loop, twenty guineas, desiring it might be brought to him, as he should wish to send it to his Excellency; secrectly resolving to replace it with one still more valuable, should it escape their researches.

He then, having ordered all his porters to remain to watch the smoking ruins, promising to send them something to drink,

drink, went home to inform his wife and son how ungraciously Fortune had served them, in appointing Ferdinand to be the preserver of their property, by preventing their warehouses from being consumed.

Mrs. Milford would most likely have mortally offended the Colonel, by expressing her approbation of Ferdinand's conduct, if he had not declared, when his father had ceased to expatiate upon the real service this envied mortal had rendered them—

"The fellow merely wished to make himself popular; for what had he done more than any of their porters could or would have done, had they, instead of him, first seen the fire?—He was as strong as an ele[illegible]bt took care to keep out [illegible]nger, [illegible]ithstanding his slipping through the roof; as it was next to impossible [illegible]ld even have bruised himself by fa[illegible]

and the bed must have prevented him from meeting with any injury;" ridiculing the idea of a man, dressed as he was, acting so very absurdly, which could only have been done with a view of rendering himself conspicuous, by convincing th lower classes that it was a matter of pe fect indifference to him, how much money he squandered away in clothes and finery. As for his having saved John Glenton's mother and daughter, they deserved to have been burned for their carelessness; he therefore hoped they would never again be allowed to inhabit a house of their's, since they might have been great losers through their abominable want of caution."

Milford agreed [illegible] him in reprobating their condu[illegible] that Ferdinand wa[illegible] [illegible]leeves when he saw him, and at all events, the whole town were no[illegible] [illegible]agnify what he had [illegible] his having lost his hat, and

and the reward he had promised to those who might find the button and loop.

"Which will never be forthcoming, depend upon it, my good Sir," rejoined the Colonel, affecting to laugh very heartily. "So you could not see through the fellow's scheme!—I dare say he procured all his jewels as dexterously as he means to do you out of a button and loop; for I would venture to take my oath, that the one he has so *unfortunately* lost, was only very highly-polished steel—no more were several of his shewy appendages; and I dare say the one he expects you will replace, is, at this very moment, secreted in his waistcoat-pocket;—for is it likely that he would not have sooner missed any thing of real value? Well, I give him great credit; for I positively take him to be a notorious swindler. However, if all his schemes do but work as well as this seems to have done, I should

should not wonder, were his next exploit to be of a far more daring nature."

Old Milford was staggered, though his own natural good sense taught him to disbelieve his envious son; but, well aware of the serious vexation he had so lately undergone, and wishing to keep him in a good humour, he replied—

"Then the biter will be bit; for I will make no purchases for his supposed Lordship, except indeed Lord Stanmore will affirm that what he has lost, were jewels, and of the value I was given to understand;"—and, with this conciliating speech, he bade his son good night, who was convinced that the smell of smoke and rubbish would effectually prevent his enjoying an hour's sleep.

END OF VOL. I.

LANE, MINERVA-PRESS, LEADENHALL-STREET.

MAHARAJA SERFOGI'S SARASWA[TI MAHAL]